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GENDER, THE GLOBAL GARMENT INDUSTRY AND
THE MOVEMENT FOR WOMEN WORKERS' RIGHTS

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CLEAN CLOTHES
CAMPAIGN



Made by Women

**Gender, the Global Garment Industry and
the Movement for Women Workers' Rights**

Clean Clothes Campaign



Made by Women

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Editors: Nina Ascoly & Chantal Finney

The editors are grateful for input from the following women who participated in the voluntary international steering committee for this publication:

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We regret to report that as this publication was going to print we learned of the death of **Angela Hale**. Angela helped shape this publication, by providing feedback as a steering committee member, by co-writing one of the featured articles (see page 75) and by agreeing to be profiled (see page 110). Her support for this project was just one example of the work she did to support justice for women workers. Angela opened up spaces within which the voices and concerns of Southern women workers could be heard. Within those spaces, women activists from all over the world gained energy and confidence from each other. We dedicate this publication to Angela, in celebration of her unique contribution.



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Contents

Introduction Why Gender Is Important	4
Costs Beyond the Workplace The Toll on Women Workers' Lives	10
Profile: Blanca Velázquez Díaz	16
Profile: Johanna Ritscher	18
Women on the Move Gender and Labour Mobility in the Global Garment Industry	20
The Chinese Working Women Network	28
Profile: Junya Lek Yimprasert	34
Profile: Marie-Françoise Le Tallec	36
Sick and Tired The Impact of Gender Roles on Garment Workers' Health	38
Profile: Rohini Hensman	46
The Committee for Asian Women	48
Profile: Ineke Zeldenrust	52
Profile: Cristina Torafing	54
The Shifting Patterns of Women's Work Informalisation Sweeps the Global Garment Industry	56
Profile: Jane Tate	66
Profile: Majda Sikosek	70
Profile: Siobhan Wall	72
Codes of Conduct Through a Gender Lens	74
Profile: Lynda Yanz	86
Profile: Maria Luisa Regalado	88
Profile: Bettina Musiolek	90
Trade Unions and the Struggle for Gender Justice	92
Profile: Emelia Yanti MD Siahaan	102
Profile: June Hartley	106
Profile: Sandra Ramos	108
Profile: Angela Hale	110
Selected Resources	112
Directory of Organisations	118
About the Contributors	126



Workers' picket at Gelmart garment factory, Philippines, 1996



CCC Triumph Out of Burma action, Netherlands, 2001



CCC Play Fair at the Olympics campaign demonstration, Bulgaria, 2004

Introduction

Why Gender Is Important

Nina Ascoly

When the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) came onto the scene in Europe in the early 1990s, one of the things motivating those mainly female activists was a desire to make people aware of the fact that almost universally it was women who were making our clothes under bad conditions, and that there were reasons for that—it was no coincidence that women were stitching our garments or gluing our sneakers together, whether it was in the Philippines, Indonesia, India or China. Clean Clothes Campaigners wanted the public to know that exploited labour in these industries often had a female face, and if something was going to be done about their situation that fact couldn't be ignored. The CCC emerged at a time when more light was being shed not only on economic globalisation and industrial restructuring, but also the gendered division of labour in that context and the processes of the feminisation, informalisation, and flexibilisation of labour—all connected in the reality of global garment production. The campaign and those involved in it should be considered in this context: one infused with frustration at women's invisibility as workers and agents

of change but also inspired by feminist critiques of the status quo—at home, in the workplace, and in the labour movement—and recognition that women are actually powerful.

As the network broadened the news kept pouring in—women workers in the garment and sports shoe industries were organising to push for change. They weren't always successful, but in any case there was a great deal of activity that sometimes resulted in progress, despite the great odds. As clearinghouse for this information, the CCC embraced the role of informing the public and industry of the roles they could and should play to support the often difficult and dangerous organising efforts of these women.

Still today, more than a decade later, the challenge remains to communicate the importance of understanding the role that gender plays in shaping conditions in these industries, and how solutions to any problems need to take this on. For the CCC this means not only considering gender when formulating and posing demands to industry to recognise and address what's going on, but also

in other facets of our work—in building awareness among different segments of society here in Europe and also in support given to partner organisations in countries where garments and sport shoes are produced.

While the CCC strives to ensure that the rights of all workers in the garment and sports shoe industries are respected, the fact that the majority of these workers are women means that ultimately the work of the CCC is largely about the empowerment of women. Some will see this as a much more radical proposal than simply calling for respect for workers' rights. However, without being clear about the gendered nature of the processes that underpin the current garment and sports shoe industries, how can labour rights advocates understand which strategies are the best way forward? If solutions are proposed that don't really take on board the reality that women work and live within, how sustainable are they likely to be?



Austrian CCC activists at Vienna
City Marathon, in front of Austrian
Parliament, 2000

What is gender? Considering gender means going beyond the biological differences between men and women, and thinking about the roles that are attributed to them. It shouldn't be a controversial undertaking—surely most people would agree that men and women's lives are different. Their lives are different because their roles are socially or culturally constructed in different ways. While the biological reality of being a man or woman is the same anywhere you go, gender roles are determined by the specific social and cultural context that you are in. Because men and women are “located” differently within our societies, everything from policies to practices affect them differently. Overlooking gender means being practically blind to the complete reality of a person's situation.

Gender influences labour practices in countless ways—ideas about the jobs women can do, how they should do them, their wages, their relationship to employers and the law. This publication was conceived in order to help people get past the jargon that sometimes obscures gender issues and provide a clear understanding of the key role gender plays in shaping the issues labour rights activists in the garment industry are tackling.

Some participants in the CCC network believe that the campaign's commitment to gender justice for women workers is implicit in all that the CCC does; others believe that this aim and the ways to address the gendered processes that facilitate rights violations in the garment and sports shoe industries aren't so obvious, and could be more explicitly highlighted.

Indeed, when the CCC convened an international gathering of its broader network in 2001 in Barcelona (85 participants from 35 countries), one of the conclusions participants reached was that gender issues needed to receive more attention within the network. The NGO and union representatives at this meeting believed that it was essential to take gender issues into consideration as each new activity or campaign was developed, and that while the focus on the workplace was important, the links to the community and the household also had to be better understood, since these spheres are also part of the reality of garment and sports shoe workers, and are also the location of rights violations.¹ Participants noted that the obligations of companies should be reconsidered in this light at all levels.

This publication is a direct output of that meeting in Barcelona. As we began to talk more explicitly about gender, some campaigners admitted they weren't clear what it meant: what is gender after all and how does it relate to our work? Where does it fit in with the demands we make of companies and public authorities to ensure that workers' rights are respected? For sure people were generally well aware that the majority of workers in the garment and sports shoe industries are women, but they did not always thoroughly understand the implications of such a fact.

Everything from the level of payment and how quickly a worker is paid, to the terms of your job—such as lack of a contract, no medical or maternity leave, no right to organise, or no pension, down to the way a supervisor speaks to or touches a worker—is informed in part by gender-based notions of what is acceptable. If you consider what this means in relation to the stress created by job

insecurity and by verbal and physical harassment, the malnutrition created by low pay, the exhaustion that results from forced overtime, and the inability to do anything about unsafe working practices and environments, then the roll-out effect on a woman's health and that of her children is immediately evident.

In most cases, women are the main producers in the so-called “care” economy— meaning they are “producing” the bulk of the care for their families or their households and even in their communities. That in itself already means they have lives different from those who don't take on those (usually unpaid) jobs, for example in terms of the time spent on those tasks, in terms of their health, etc. And this is before even considering the impact of the conditions of their work in the “cash” economy where they make clothes and sports shoes for the entire world.

As highlighted in the article by Diane Reyes (see page 11), the costs to women of working in the industry reach far beyond the workplace. In telling the story of one garment worker, Reyes makes clear how bad labour practices can for example poison relationships, dash plans for getting an education and moving up out of poverty, and separate families. What do these costs mean—for women, their communities and society as a whole?

Perceptions of gender play a role in propelling women in and out of different jobs throughout the industry's supply networks and have an impact on the form their jobs take.

Included among the articles that follow is one on migrant women workers (see page 21), an important segment of the workforce in the garment industry. Women travel within their countries and also across borders and find work to support themselves and their families in the garment and sports shoe industries. Trade agreements and foreign investments create jobs in some places and eliminate jobs in others, and for women who need to earn a living this means being on the move to get work where they can. Treaties like the African



Rally in support of
Bed & Bath workers
demanding back pay
and severance, Thailand,
2003

Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) have meant more factories in sub-Saharan African countries, while the phase out of garment quotas for North American and European markets that were set by the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) also means shifting sourcing strategies by global companies. The industry is always in flux, and this has an impact on the women (and men) who populate it.

As outsiders in new communities, migrant women find themselves facing specific challenges, all of which are compounded by separation from family and lack of a support network. As migrants without legal residency status often the only jobs open to them are in illegal or unregistered workplaces. Unrecognised as “workers”, they lack legal protection and face difficulties if they demand fair and decent working conditions. These women are still generally “invisible”—not “real” workers, in not “real” workplaces, yet these are the very workers, migrant and non-migrant, that organisers must reach out to. Devising strategies to connect to these women, understand their needs, and support their attempts to gain respect as workers with legal rights should be a top priority for trade union and NGO activists. If this growing part of the garment industry—the so-called informal economy (discussed in greater depth on page 57)—remains unreached by efforts to improve labour practices, it means failing to address one of the main problems women workers face: the informalisation of their jobs. The CCC is increasingly receiving reports of formal jobs in factories being made “informal”, in some cases of entire workforces being laid off, only to have the same jobs they previously had as permanent employees offered back to them as contract work.

Gender plays a role not only in the problems faced by workers, but also in the attempts by various stakeholders to address injustice and improve labour practices. If initiatives that aim to support workers’ demands in actuality are not accessible to those workers, what credibility or value do they have as being communicators of those women’s needs? The onus is on all who make claims to varying degrees about supporting workers’ rights to educate themselves as to the specific needs of women workers and to ensure that women workers’ voices are heard, respected and taken into account during any decision-making and institution-building initiatives intended to improve their situation.

This applies equally to companies with their own codes of conduct and compliance departments, to multi-stakeholder initiatives which monitor and verify compliance with labour standards, to governments with labour inspectorates and courts charged with upholding justice under the law, to unions as workers’ representatives and NGOs as watchdogs and advocates. It even applies to the CCC itself. If a public awareness-raising campaign conveys priorities that are not in sync with those of women workers’, or if social auditors fail to carry out and report on interviews where workers can speak frankly, or if multi-stakeholder initiatives complaint mechanisms are generally unknown or inaccessible to workers with grievances, or if a union’s leadership is disconnected from workers, how can these initiatives succeed in furthering their purported goals?

Many of the successes that have been achieved have meant rethinking conventional approaches to these challenges. The women action researchers, consumer activists, union organisers, and others highlighted here have taken risks and championed different approaches that have contributed to the movement that in all its shapes and forms has brought us to where we are now in the struggle for justice for garment workers. These women demystify what it takes to be gender aware. They demonstrate that gender awareness is not a confusing proposition at all. Put simply, keeping women workers’ needs central to what guides their work is what keeps them on the path of supporting worker empowerment.

This publication is part of a broader drive within the CCC to provide a gender analysis of labour rights issues, and specifically to document and re-state gendered concerns that relate to workers’ rights in the garment and sports shoe industries. Also it is part of CCC efforts to document examples of initiatives that do address these concerns, and to present ideas on how these concerns should be explicitly integrated in the work of the CCC. We envision this publication as a resource for building awareness among those directly involved in the Clean Clothes Campaigns and among CCC supporters, and more extensively

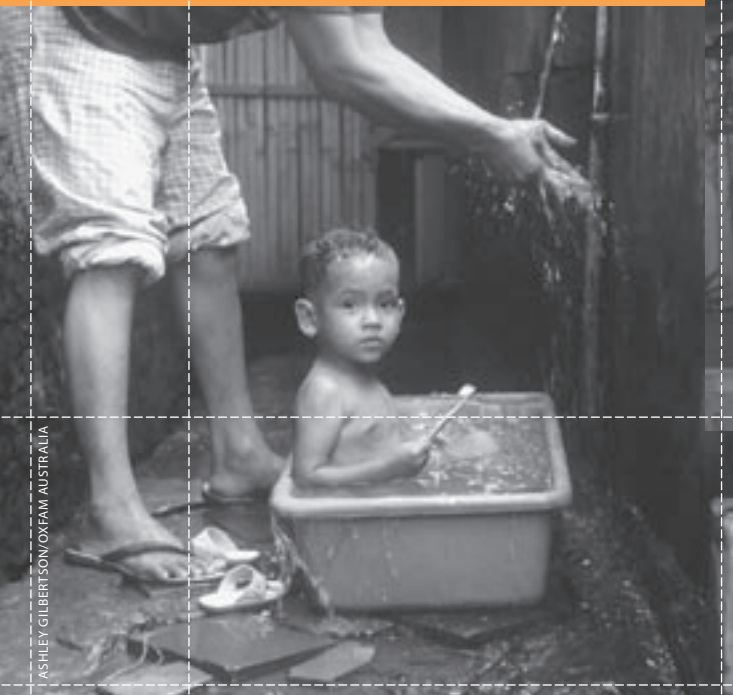
among other NGOs and trade unions. It could possibly be a resource for those in the industry and the multi-stakeholder initiatives that seek to address labour practices in the sector. Clearly, a lot of learning still needs to be done on many levels, and we believe this publication can be a tool to clearly communicate what the issues are and possible ways for addressing them. We’re not aiming for this publication to directly reach women workers themselves (if it does, that’s a bonus), but instead to enable their voices to be heard, and their demands and grievances to be known and understood by those who, men and women, are in a position to influence their working conditions.

Putting together this publication has been an opportunity to draw upon the expertise within the CCC network on gender issues. In 2004, an international steering committee was formed to provide guidance on the content of this publication and to recommend possible writers; the editors are immensely grateful for the feedback received from these six women who between them have extensive experience working with women workers’ organisations as academics, researchers, activists, trade unionists and campaigners. Many of the activists featured and the authors of articles actively participate in CCC activities. Coming from different countries around the globe, they bring with them a variety of perspectives on the role of gender in the lives of women workers in the garment and sports shoe industries. In the following pages, the authors raise numerous challenges that are important for all stakeholders to address. After reading these articles we hope there will be no confusion about why gender should be a key concern for all labour rights advocates.

¹ Women’s rights are also violated outside the workplace. That cannot be ignored as it shapes the reality of who a woman worker is, both in and outside the workplace. Discrimination in terms of double workload (productive and reproductive), discrimination in the community and in the home, discrimination before the law (in the shape of regulations regarding property ownership, inheritance, etc.), these are all factors in creating the context in which a woman lives and works. She doesn’t shed these aspects of her reality when she enters her workplace.



Garment workers walking to work,
Bangladesh, 1995



Garment worker at home bathing child, Indonesia, 2001



Garment worker in her dormitory,
China, 1995

MARIJKE SMIT

Costs Beyond the Workplace

The Toll on Women Workers' Lives

Diane S. Reyes

Allow me to introduce you to Amelita Fernandez, daughter of poor tenant farmers in the rural Philippines, who dreamed of escaping the life that had been the fate of her family for generations. In 1988 after graduating from high school at the top of her class, Amelita, just 17 years old, came to Manila to work as a domestic helper. She enrolled at night school and took a course in dressmaking. Her plan was to find work in a garment factory, hoping that a stable job with a higher salary would enable her to continue her studies. An accounting course from a respectable university in the city, she thought. She fantasized about working as an office accountant and going back to her province as a professional.

After graduation, Amelita applied for a job at Karayom Garments Inc., which used to produce for US companies such as Gap, Sears, Van Heusen, and Dockers, and got hired.

Using her savings, Amelita rented a room in an apartment that she shared with two other families. Two weeks into her work in the fac-

tory, however, Amelita realized that she would not fulfil her dream of pursuing her studies. She had to work more than 10 hours everyday due to high production quotas and in addition, she was rotated to take the night shift every other week. Nonetheless, Amelita considered herself lucky to have finished her course and found a factory job. She came to terms with her situation and just decided to help her parents by sending them part of her salary.

Amelita then met Roger, a co-worker from the company. They got married in 1990, after she was promoted to permanent worker status. They lived happily during the early years of their marriage despite their simple life and difficult work. They rented a small apartment of their own and Amelita felt satisfied with life.

Things began to change after they had children. With both of them working, they were forced to send all of their children to Bicol, a province south of Manila, for Amelita's parents to take care of them. Four children were born and 70% of their combined salaries went to support them.¹



Garment workers at home,
Indonesia, 2001

They gave up their apartment and returned to renting a small room in an apartment shared with other families. They felt bad about the separation from their children. They only enjoyed life as a whole family when visiting for one week each year during the Catholic holiday of Lent.

Things took a turn for the worse in 1998 when the company ended Roger's employment. He tried to apply for a job in other companies but with no success. He turned to doing odd jobs like driving a neighbour's tricycle whenever the regular driver took a rest or doing construction work. His only regular source of income was doing porter work in the wet market when goods were delivered at night.

Amelita spent more than 13 hours out of the home everyday due to long working hours and commuting time. She was transferred from the day to night shift every other week. Roger usually left the house at 2:00 a.m. for his porter work at the market and spent the rest of the day seeking work. Rarely being at home at the same time led to jealousies. Confrontations became violent and led to short separations. It took time before they learned to make adjustments in order to spend time together.

With their diminished income, their biggest problem became where to get the money to support the children. Amelita tried applying for a loan from the Social Security System (SSS) but her application was turned down. The SSS informed her that Karayom Garments Inc. had stopped remitting her monthly contribution so she was not eligible for a loan.

Their two elder children, a boy and a girl then aged seven and eight, had to stop going to school. Eventually, Amelita and Roger were forced to take the two elder children with them to ease her parents' burden of caring for all four children without regular support. They shared the small room for living quarters, which left Amelita and Roger with no privacy. The elder, though still a child, worked as a caller for passengers at the bus station. The younger child took care of the house chores. She also helped bring in a little money by taking care, from time to time, of the younger children of those of their better

off housemates. Sometimes, she received money for her services. At other times, she was just given food, which she and her brother shared when their parents were at work during the day. The combined income of the family barely enabled them to send money to support the two younger children left in the province.

At the end of the '90s, orders began to fall. The company began laying off many workers. The workers' union resisted this policy as a result of which the company instead enforced a shorter working week. Workers were rotated to take a four-day, sometimes a three-day week. Management stopped paying benefits including thirteenth month pay. Amelita's family became desperate. They skipped breakfast; sometimes, they had to eat instant noodles for days. To ease their condition, Amelita solicited laundry and ironing work from their housemates and from neighbours during the three days or four days that she was not at work in the factory.

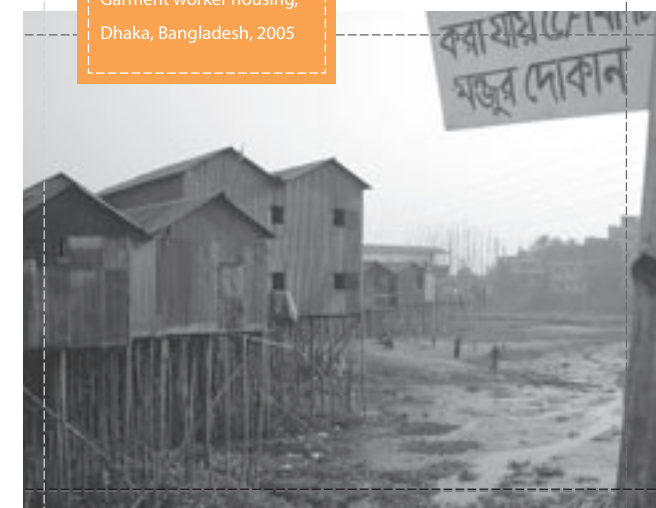
In 2002, the company began delaying paying workers' salaries and finally closed down. It left millions in salaries, benefits and social security contributions unpaid. Her family's miserable life turned into a nightmare. Daily food became a problem. Their housemates, out of charity, did not demand their share of the rent. Amelita did the daily cleaning of the entire apartment in return. She also became their regular laundry and ironing woman. Meanwhile, she did sewing work from time to time for a sub-contractor of other garment factories. These times were rare and irregular. Like her husband, she took odd jobs. She and her daughter sold coffee, cigarettes and snacks for jitney drivers at dawn. They got home at 8 a.m. to do house cleaning and prepare meals to sell to the jitney drivers at lunchtime. After that, she washed clothes—usually from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.—and ironed clothes at night, usually until 10:30 p.m.

I first met Amelita in 2002, three months before Karayom Garments ceased its operations. I met her again in December 2004 when I rushed to the Department of Labor and Employment upon hear-

ing that hundreds of garment workers had forcefully occupied the whole building. The company they worked for had abruptly filed for bankruptcy and ceased operations without clarifying whether unpaid wages and benefits would be given to them. I immediately noticed her among the hundreds of workers who joined the mass action. I invited her to join me for a snack at a nearby fast-food restaurant where I interviewed her for this article. Asked why she joined the protest when she was no longer a union member, Amelita vehemently protested that the end of factory employment does not prohibit workers from protesting their plight. She said that she and many of her former co-workers joined the protest of workers from a different company whose management had done what Karayom Garments did to them.

I asked her what she and her family were going to do about their current situation. Amelita told me that they planned to return to the province before Christmas. She and her husband had agreed to take over the small, tenanted land, that her ageing parents could no longer work. That and other odd jobs to see their family through. She was wistful about the future, but she was thankful there was somewhere to return to. After 16 years, Amelita is returning to the countryside, where all her dreams began.

Garment worker housing,
Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2005



Amelita's story is but one of many such stories from workers all over the world. Stories of separation from family, especially children, and of damaged relationships; stories of the difficulties of raising a family or having a social life because of long working hours. Stories of the impossibility, again because of the long hours, of studying or taking up after-work activities. Oxfam International estimates that community relations suffer from women workers' inability to invest themselves in the activities of, for instance, community organisations providing child care or credit.²

Over the years, researchers have compiled the stories of garment workers around the world who have experienced deep poverty on a daily basis and over the long-term, which has had an impact on them and their families, and affects their communities. Many have had to pull children out of school because of their inability to cover school fees or because children need to take up paid employment to help cover the basic costs of living, or are needed to look after younger siblings. Like Amelita, workers from China to Indonesia to Central America have had to send children to live with far off relatives because work left them with no time or resources to care for children. In Morocco, of women garment workers with children old enough to care for siblings, 80% had taken daughters under 14 out of school to care for younger siblings, sacrificing their education and future prospects.³



Women workers washing up, Sri Lanka, 2004

In most countries, garment workers are migrants from rural areas who have ventured into big cities to “try their luck”. They come in their late teens and for varied reasons, and sometimes find their way back to the provinces in their middle age. They endure the loneliness of separation from their families and friends, living in cramped quarters with workers like themselves. They scrimp on everything to be able to send money back home and to save a little for the rare “good time” with the girls, but mostly for presents when their work schedules allow a short vacation with their families. Some of them get married and those who do face the difficulty and uncertainty of being able to send their children to school to ensure a future brighter than theirs.

But many stay single, mainly because of the absence of a social life. In the Philippines, most begin their working life helping their parents send their siblings to school then

continue helping their siblings to send their own children to school. In some societies, leaving their families to work in the city brands single women workers as “bad girls”, which will further hinder their chances of marrying. Advertisements for brides in Sri Lanka have been known to specify “no factory girls”.⁴

Starting their working life at the height of their youth and working such long hours takes its toll on women's health and bodies. Juggling time and money to ensure the well-being of families, especially where there are children, is stressful physically and emotionally. The breaking point is reached when due to the physical demands on their bodies they get sick and are fired—leaving women without health care when they most need it.

Women who engage in organising their colleagues—whether in factories or communities—discover that such activity is liberating. However, they encounter a different problem—especially married women. Among their co-workers there is welcoming acceptance but among some of the husbands, there is resentment. In most cultures, it is expected that a woman's place is in the home; therefore time spent off work should be devoted to caring for home and family. Some married relationships are strained because of the time spent outside by these women-organisers or officers, and some have even resulted in separations. In these cases, women's emotional and physical health is doubly burdened because of having to shoulder alone the responsibilities of both breadwinner and nurturer of the family. The fact that organising may not be thought suitable for a woman may also create difficulties in finding a partner—that is, if there is time to find one.

There is an extent to which the garment industry such as it is operating at present is subsidised, literally, by women workers—who have little choice but to sacrifice to it their health and family life, their own prospects and that of their children and often, consequently, their own sense of worth.



Garment workers at their dormitory, Sri Lanka, 2004

¹ Though the state of the Filipino economy was and still is forcing both parents out to work, contraception was not available, hence the high number of children. The industry meanwhile failed and continues to fail to take into account the parental responsibilities of workers. A bill pending in congress to make family planning and contraception available from health centres is being opposed by the Catholic church. A recent study shows that parents would like to be able to plan their families, all the more so in the present, difficult economic context.

² “Good jobs” and hidden costs: women workers documenting the price of precarious employment, Thalia Kidder and Kate Raworth. Oxfam International (2004), p.5. http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/downloads/gdt_kidder_and_raworth.pdf.

³ Kidder and Raworth: 6.

⁴ Kidder and Raworth: 5.



Blanca Velázquez Díaz

Coordinator, Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador

In 1999, I became a member of the first independent trade union in the state of Puebla, Mexico, organising workers in a Siemens factory that manufactured spare parts for cars. It was after this that the idea of creating a space for workers was born. A space where men and women workers could learn not only about human and labour rights, but also how to exercise and defend them. My experience taught me my rights as a human being and as a working woman, and I felt the need to share it with those suffering from the abuses of employers and working in terrible conditions.

So we started CAT (*El Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador*, Workers' Support Centre) in May 2001. I am responsible for organising and external affairs, I coordinate the planning of strategic campaigns in defence of labour rights through the creation of independent trade unions, and I maintain contact with local, national and international organisations. Such links are important to support the struggle of Mexican workers.

CAT works directly with workers. We believe that once workers know about their rights, they are able to defend themselves. We visit workers at home, which is very successful in terms

“We believe that once workers know about their rights, they are able to defend themselves”

of organising and has the advantage that you get to know their living conditions and gain their trust. We use theatre as a way of teaching and involving workers. The plays we use are a strategic tool in our organisation's awareness-raising work and are taken into the communities where *maquila* workers live. We have three plays: *The Other King Kong Story*, which is about the struggle of the men and women working at Kuk Dong garment factory in Atlixico, Puebla. It shows the importance of organising and resistance and is based on the experience and voices of those who lived through the threats, discrimination and abuse. The story has a successful ending when the independent union wins the day and signs a collective bargaining agreement. *The Machine* illustrates how workers can organise into unions to improve working conditions, and *The Capital M in 'Mujer' is Not for Macho!* is about three women recounting their own experience of what it's like to be a woman. These are raw stories that raise people's awareness of the abuse that women can experience just because they are women. For the CAT this is a successful way of raising awareness because it covers broader human rights issues as well as workers' rights.

Our first campaign was to help the workers of Kuk-Dong (now Mex-Mode) fight their struggle. We provided advice, helped workers document their case and assessed violations. Then we were involved in the Matamoros and Tarrant cases, which have still not been brought to conclusion.¹ There was crucial international support in all three cases.

It is work that I do with a lot of joy and commitment. It's rewarding to see how women in the *maquilas* fight, to see people's awareness develop, and to know that you have inspired them to fight for what

belongs to them. I want to continue, I know that in the future things can really take a turn for the better. We certainly should not be satisfied with what we have achieved so far.

One woman who has been a source of inspiration is Benita Galeana and her fight for workers' rights, and also Digna Ochoa, a lawyer and activist of great social awareness, very close to the people. She was murdered for defending people's rights.

Women's position in society has changed. Thanks to their participation in trade unions, there are today more and more women who can make themselves heard by taking up a post in trade union committees. But there's an awful lot left to do to change the macho ideas that still dominate our homes and workplaces. We must demand our human rights, we must denounce abuses, and we must have reforms that give us full equality of opportunity so that we can aspire to a more just and equitable life. In the end, it isn't until all women no longer feel threatened by violence, are no longer discriminated against and can be heard in public spheres, their children are treated fairly and there is always enough to eat at the table that we will know things have really changed for the better.

¹ For details of the three cases, see <http://www.cleanclothes.org/urgent/03-09-10.htm>, <http://www.cleanclothes.org/urgent/03-01-22.htm> and <http://www.cleanclothes.org/urgent/01-09-26-1.htm>.



Johanna Ritscher

Activist, CCC Sweden

When I was ten years old, my teachers called my parents to a meeting to discuss my behaviour. Their problem was that I behaved like a boy, taking too much space, being too lively. For the first time I understood that I was not just a human being or a child but also a girl, which had implications about what I was allowed to do or say. Gradually, I started to understand that it was not me but the world around me that had a problem. Norms and expectations are used to order people into different hierarchies where gender, colour, class, etc. determine what we are allowed to do and how we do it. Worst of all, people seemed to accept this.

A few years later I got involved with the Red Cross Youth, with the intention of learning and spreading knowledge about the world order and how to change it. I started to work as a volunteer on fair trade issues. The Red Cross Youth being a member of the Swedish CCC coalition, it was a natural step to also become involved with the CCC. Together with another Red Cross Youth activist I am, since the “Play Fair at the Olympics” campaign, in charge of coordinating and mobilising CCC support groups in Sweden.

“Thousands of young people have become involved ... and have helped expose irresponsible companies and put pressure on them”

We have given a lot of talks, organised training events and put a lot of effort into street actions. I think we have succeeded in spreading awareness of the CCC and extended its support network. We have used alternative fashion shows and theatre to expose working conditions, role plays to show how the money is divided along the supply chain, ball games where the rules obviously favour one of the teams, and of course music festivals. Thousands of young people have become involved as a result and have helped expose irresponsible companies and put pressure on them.

Although the global situation and exploitation of people and nature are getting worse, a movement is developing that is increasingly focused and effective. From a gender point of view, young women no longer put up with being treated according to obsolete standards—they have the courage to resist. Women are made stronger by their involvement in a forum like the Clean Clothes Campaign. The CCC is a gender struggle as well as a struggle for human rights.

When I’m not a CCC activist I am still involved in the Red Cross Youth work on sustainable development and I study political science. I am also vice president of Sweden’s Fair Trade Committee. And I’m learning about the UN, since I’m going to New York as the youth representative of the Swedish delegation to this year’s Commission for Sustainable Development meeting—I’m soooooo excited! On top of this, I have my love, my friends, music and movies to keep me busy. And I paint. I can’t keep all the madness I see in the world within myself, I have to let it out, and I do this through painting.



Swedish CCC activists use a fashion show to raise awareness of labour rights issues and the Play Fair at the Olympics Campaign during a music festival, 2004



Raquel Lexama, a migrant worker from Mexico, with daughter Monica, at May 1 "Caravan for Justice" event, Los Angeles, California, 2004



GARMENT WORKER CENTER



Workers' dormitory, China

Women on the Move

Gender and Labour Mobility in the Global Garment Industry

Kimi Lee and Nina Ascoly

Migrant workers have long been playing an important role in the garment industry. When industries seek to become more competitive cost-wise, indigenous workers are often replaced by migrant workers who can be paid less and have a weaker bargaining position. This includes migrants from other countries (for example Burmese workers going to Thailand, Chinese workers going to Africa, Central American workers to the US), and internal migrants—for example rural women from China's interior provinces leaving home for the nation's booming garment and sports shoe industries in the South East.

The story of Maura, who migrated to the US and found work in the garment industry, highlights some of the problems faced by migrant garment workers.

Maura was born in El Salvador, where she helped her husband selling watermelons, corn, oranges and pineapples—first in a truck and then from a store. During the civil war in El Salvador, her husband was killed. Maura had no choice but to leave her three

young children with her mother and go to the United States to work in order to support them.

She arrived in the US in 1985. Maura searched for work and after a month found that the garment industry was the easiest field to enter. An advertisement offered to pay \$80 to learn single and double stitching. After two weeks at that school, Maura found a job in a garment factory in downtown Los Angeles. The workplace was filled with cockroaches and rats. The ceilings were falling apart, many lights did not work and the toilets had no doors and no toilet paper and were filthy. There was no dining area in the factory and no water for the workers to drink. The workplace was dangerous because wires and fabric scraps covered the floors. Sometimes, the owner locked the doors to keep out health inspectors.

"When there was a lot of work, they wouldn't let us take breaks or go to the toilet. I also worked from home, sometimes from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. to finish the work. The owner paid me less for my work at home than in the factory." Maura says the owners were kind when she worked late and on Sundays, "but when I no longer wanted to work so much, they became angry."

Maura left that factory and found work in several other factories—all with similar working conditions. She ended up at a factory sewing entire blouses for 19¢, while the retail price was \$13. The factory owner told Maura there was no more work for her after she complained that he was not paying her for all the pieces she sewed.

After being fired, Maura came to the Garment Worker Center in Los Angeles for help in securing the wages that her former employer owed her. Maura says that she is motivated to continue struggling for better pay and working conditions because “there are so many people working in the industry who don’t know their rights or are afraid because they are undocumented.” The Garment Worker Center was successful in assisting Maura reclaim over \$15,000 in owed wages and penalties from the factory. She was able to return to El Salvador to visit her children after 18 years. She has been able to send money home to her family but her children want to join her in the United States. Maura is unable to help them migrate and continues to live alone and work in Los Angeles.



Asian migrant workers at garment factory, Madagascar, 2000

The specific challenges faced by migrant workers

While Maura was fortunate enough to finally visit her family, many other workers never get that opportunity. Workers are forced to leave home to seek work to support families they never get to see or spend time with. Globalisation, free trade agreements and structural adjustment policies have led to economic changes that have left many unable to make a living in their home countries—particularly in rural areas. Millions of workers have been pushed out of their homes and into foreign lands.

Even though migrant workers may not speak the right language or know anyone in the new country, they go in search of any opportunity to work. They take the worst jobs, usually the most dangerous or tedious. They face discrimination at many different

levels. As migrants, they are usually undocumented or without immigration papers and must work in the underground economy or as guest workers without any rights. If they speak out, they are threatened with deportation. They receive the lowest pay for the dirtiest work and think they have little recourse when they are mistreated or not paid properly.

In some countries, like the United States, undocumented workers are protected by labour laws but the workers do not know their rights and live in fear of being found. In many others, they are denied coverage by national labour laws:

- ▶ in Singapore, many migrant workers are excluded from the provisions of the Employment Act;¹
- ▶ in Poland (where undocumented workers from Belarus and Ukraine work in the informal garment industry), undocumented foreign workers are not covered by national labour law;²
- ▶ some countries (for example Taiwan, Hong Kong) have separate wage categories for migrant workers. Malaysia has no national minimum wage, but in some cases the Malaysian government has agreements with migrant-sending countries that cite a basic wage for immigrant workers from these countries. As a result, employers are required by law to pay different wages to workers of different nationalities.³

One major problem for migrant workers is that they often have to pay high and usually illegal recruitment fees to be placed in a factory. Workers then have to borrow at high interest rates to pay this off.

The feminisation of migration

All over the world, migrant workers are increasingly women. The ILO reports that 800,000 women every year leave their home countries in Asia to find work and that women migrate at a higher rate than men from countries such as Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Women workers, considered less valuable than their male counterparts because of their responsibilities for taking care of households and children, are seen as less deserving of training and are therefore less skilled and less likely to get support to transition into other jobs. This forces women into any type of work possible, including work abroad, to support their families.

For manufacturing companies under pressure from their Northern customers and looking to cut labour costs, migrant women workers are an attractive option. As women, “flexible” work patterns are expected of them. As migrant workers, they are forced to accept lower wages and worse conditions. Women work day after day for sub-standard wages and send every bit of money home to their family. They are mostly unable to save enough to change their situation.

Cultural barriers, competition with local workers, racism, legal status and the immobility that might accompany their lack of documentation were all cited in a seminar held by the Clean Clothes Campaign in Meissen, Germany, in September 2004⁴ as problems migrant workers have to contend with. Fear, debt, vulnerability, lack of confidence, unsafe working conditions, difficulties in finding housing, isolation, lack of support network and cultural pressures from family or community were also highlighted. In addition, women face sexual harassment and gender-related discrimination.

Women who do attempt to go home face other challenges. In many cases, leaving to work in a factory, going to a large city and living outside of the family homes means breaking out of the women’s cultural traditions. When they return home, they are treated differently. Their experiences outside the community may make them appear suspect or threatening to the traditional gender norms. They can also have difficulty reintegrating into their communities due to their increased independence and may question the traditional roles they left behind. This is all the more so when women have gone to work abroad.

Proposals for supporting migrant workers

Migrant workers are mostly in a very weak position regarding the law, which makes it difficult for them to press for better conditions. In the Mae Sot area of Thailand, near the border with Burma, garment factories routinely employ Burmese migrants who are unprotected by law and deported if they dare complain about conditions. In June 2003, Burmese migrant garment workers earning less than 50% of the Thai legal minimum wage were dismissed and deported after they made a formal complaint regarding wages, forced overtime, and other issues to the Tak Labor Protection and Welfare Office.⁵ According to the Thai Labour Campaign, support for both legal and illegal migrant workers is best provided by extending the Labour Protection Act to include them.⁶

Possible ways forward for labour rights' campaigners include:

- ▶ lobbying to extend legal and social protection to migrant workers, whether legal or illegal;
- ▶ creating space for organisations that work directly with migrant workers to share their experiences and participate in strategising;
- ▶ strategising with organisations that look explicitly at the gendered processes underpinning the dynamics of migration and the gendered needs of workers;
- ▶ campaigning for migrant workers' rights at a multinational level, involving countries where production is located, where the goods are sold, from which workers originate and where the multinational companies involved are based.

Further research is needed to map out more precisely the flows of migrant workers in the garment industry and identify the gendered processes which may underlie their movements. Such research should further define the needs of women migrant workers so that labour rights' advocates can develop strategies to better support them.

There is growing pressure on trade unions to represent migrant workers, which requires more flexible forms of organising (as well as education and training about migrant workers' issues, language and cultural differences), support for pro-immigrant policies and addressing the issue of competition between local and migrant workers. Trade unions active in sectors other than garments have taken actions which are replicable in the garment sector, among them representing workers anonymously in order to protect them (Switzerland) and setting up a migrant workers' section (Germany).

During the Meissen seminar positive cases of organising among migrant workers in the UK and the Netherlands were shared. Organisers from the same language group or culture as the workers in question were used, operating under the principle that "like organises like".

To address the concerns of migrant workers, there is a great need to internationalise organising and even union membership. In the Baltics, gas station workers have been able to have their union membership recognised while working abroad—initiating a kind of "union passport". The British trade union centre TUC invited Solidarnosc, its counterpart in Poland, to send organisers to help organise Polish workers in the UK.



CWWN activity, 2003

China's internal migrant workers

Most of the young women working in the garment factories of Shenzhen and Guangdong provinces are from the poor, rural areas of China. They come to the southern coastal provinces in their late teens to work in the factories of special economic zones. Their families need their economic contribution, all the more so since China's entry into the WTO is said to be exacerbating poverty in the countryside by putting already vulnerable rural communities in competition with food producers all over the world.

The young people look forward to life in the city but they are soon disillusioned. Often poorly educated, they have limited employment prospects. Very low wages make it difficult to survive in cities where the cost of living is considerably higher than where they come from. Very long hours—a twelve to fourteen hour day—are the norm, as is one day or half a day off per month. There are no annual holidays. Overnight work is common when orders are pressing. Stress from poverty, long hours and loneliness make the young workers, who lack the support of friends and family, vulnerable to illness and accidents. Unlike the city's permanent residents, they are not entitled to subsidised housing, education, training and medical care or to social welfare. They are often without written contracts.

Although China's labour legislation is quite good, it goes mostly unimplemented so as not to put off investors. This position is supported by the official trade union. The only information workers get is from the factory, and this is often inadequate. At the time of the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic for instance, workers were only given officially-sanctioned information: the impact of the sickness was deliberately hidden.

Despite the obstacles Chinese migrant workers are beginning to assert their rights. The total number of arbitration cases has grown from 12,368 cases in 1993 to 184,116 cases in 2002. The number of collective cases arbitrated (involving more than thirty employees) has also increased, with more than 600,000 employees redressing grievances through the collective labour dispute arbitration system in 2002. Government officials also record an increase in the average number of employees involved per case, underlining the collective approach to solving labour conflicts. There are other ways in which Chinese migrant workers assert their rights—using strikes and protests such as blocking traffic, which are increasingly reported by the media.

From information supplied by the Chinese Working Women Network (CWWN)

Countries of origin have a role to play in protecting their nationals. The Philippine Embassy for example employs a migrant workers' officer to deal with Philippino workers' problems. More must also be done to create opportunities for workers so that they do not have to migrate.

Public authorities in the host countries must be lobbied to stop harassing and deporting migrant workers and instead give them legal and social protection. The UN convention on the rights of migrants, which outlines rights and standards, is yet to be ratified by the US and Western European countries.

Migrant workers themselves have organised into associations (to end isolation but also to create political pressure back home to positively influence their situation in the host countries) and through community centres. Initiatives such as these are especially useful to isolated women migrant workers whose cultures prevent them from associating much with others.



Workers' dormitory,
China

Most migrant workers are trapped, trying to find work to survive. They do not want to draw attention to themselves and concentrate on working to send money home to their families. All too often, their host countries are only too happy to ignore their plight. As globalisation pushes more workers into migration, it is important for community members to support the rights of all workers and to acknowledge their contributions to society. Migrant workers pick our food, watch our children, build our homes and make our clothes. We must recognise their contributions rather than condemn them, support a fair legalisation program for workers to be protected from exploitation and stop trade policies that force workers from their homes and their families.

Successful campaigning for the rights of migrant workers

Two hundred and fifty young Vietnamese and Chinese women and men went to the US territory of American Samoa in the South Pacific as "guest" workers. They paid (illegal) fees of \$4,000-8,000 to "management companies" to secure three-year contracts to work in a South Korean-owned garment factory. Most of the workers were from poor, rural areas and mortgaged their homes or took out large loans to pay the fees. They hoped to repay their debts in their first year of work, then start saving money, but their hopes were quickly dashed.

Workers found themselves earning \$1.22 an hour instead of the minimum wage of \$2.55, or not being paid at all. They were trapped—working long hours, not earning enough to pay off their debts and prevented by their contract from seeking work elsewhere. Housing and food provided by the factory amounted to rat- and roach-infested rooms and inadequate meals of cabbage soup and rice.

Workers who confronted the Daewoosa factory management about these inhumane conditions were met with retaliation and violence. On 28 November 2000, they were harassed and beaten

by armed security guards as a means of forcing them back to work after they had stopped work for non-payment of wages. One woman lost her eye and a man lost hearing in one ear. Some workers that protested were fired and deported. Another time, workers refused to work until they were paid and the company withheld food for two days.

In this case, which received international attention, the workers took action against Daewoosa. The Vietnamese diaspora in the US was involved, helping to publicize the workers' case, raising money for their basic necessities, sending translators to Samoa to help with their legal case and lobbying US and Vietnamese politicians to investigate the case. In April 2002, the Samoa High Court ordered the company to pay workers \$3.5 million in compensation and provide them with assistance to either return home or go to the US. The factory owner was convicted of human trafficking the following year. The Vietnamese government also prosecuted officials who took part in the scheme to send workers to Samoa.

Kimi Lee

¹ *Struggling to be Heard: Asian Women in Informal Work*, Committee for Asian Women, 2001, p. 59.

² Musiolek, Bettina (2004) E-mail correspondence with Nina Ascoly, regarding her discussions with researcher Alicja Kostecka and labor lawyer Barbara Godlewska, in Warsaw Dec. 2001 and Nov. 2003.

³ Fair Labor Association (2003) "First Public Report: Towards Improving Workers' Lives (August 1, 2001 to July 31, 2002)," Washington, p. 100.

⁴ Ascoly (2004) "Campaigning strategies on informal labour in the global garment industry," IRENE/CCC report on seminar held in Meissen, Germany Sept. 23-25, 2004.

⁵ CCC case file, 2003.

⁶ See www.thailabour.org/docs/BurmeseMigrants.html.

Two garment workers reading *Sweet Words Among Sisters*, a magazine published by CWWN and distributed free of charge to migrant workers at lunch time by CWWN outreach staff



The Chinese Working Women Network

by Jenny Chan¹

“On 19 November 1993, a fire engulfed a factory in Shenzhen, China, run by a Hong Kong subcontractor to [a brand of toys] famous in both the US and Europe. The blaze killed over eighty workers, all but two of them female. Fifty others were seriously burned and another twenty injured. The tragedy shocked Chinese society as well as the international community.”²

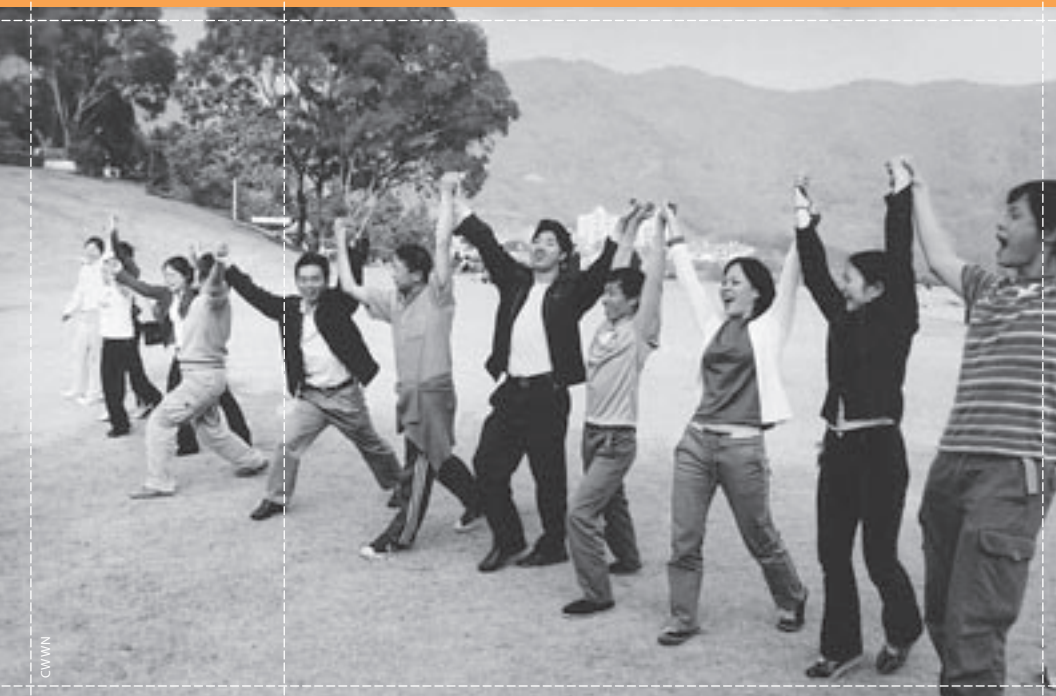
It was this fire at the Zhili toy factory in Southern China which inspired a number of Chinese activists and scholars to found the Chinese Working Women Network (CWWN) in Hong Kong in 1996.

CWWN aims to promote better lives for Chinese migrant women workers—by raising gender awareness among Chinese women and empowering women workers so they can “fight for their rights in a collective and effective way” and become more independent, both socially and economically.

In contemporary China, limited educational opportunities (especially for women), enormous difficulties earning a living from farming (due to low

prices for agricultural products, shortages of arable land and heavy farm taxes) and lack of village employment prospects continue to push girls in their late teens out of their home villages. Some of these young women also aspire to escape arranged marriages, family conflicts and patriarchal oppression, whilst others simply want to widen their horizons and experience urban modernity. In the fast developing Chinese economy, millions of internal migrant workers are working in foreign-owned enterprises in the coastal special economic zones. In the labour-intensive manufacturing industries of the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong, the gender ratio between male and female internal migrant workers is said to be about 1 to 4. Most employers favour recruiting young girls from the countryside, whom they believe to be docile, hard working and easy to control.

Due to the political situation, there are very few individuals and non-profit organisations providing help to these migrant communities. CWWN is a membership, non-profit organisation with an elected executive committee responsible for strategy and policy. The six executive committee



Migrant workers at New Year Festival organized by CWWN, 2004

members for 2005-06 are university professors and postgraduate students from Hong Kong, and give their time voluntarily. CWWN currently employs three coordinators (from Hong Kong) and nine mainland Chinese organisers who are former migrant workers. All twelve workers are full-time. Each year, CWWN helps hundreds of thousands of workers in Shenzhen City and the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong. Most of them are newcomers: job turnover is high and women migrant workers return home after just a few years in the factory.³

The workers themselves are actively involved in CWWN activities, in particular legal education, gender awareness groups and cultural activities. Workers for example share what they have learnt in the course of legal training sessions with other workers in their dormitories. Others have helped design questionnaires about a new formula for calculating compensation following industrial accidents. One group wrote a play about gender and work, performed on International Women's Day and other special occasions at CWWN's Cultural Centre. Another group participates in the rotating editorial board of *Sweet Words Among Sisters*, a bi-monthly magazine distributed free of charge among workers by CWWN.⁴



CWWN uses a renovated bus to facilitate outreach work in three industrial towns in China

In the course of its outreach work, CWWN takes on board a whole range of issues, from health and safety to exploring—with women wanting to return to their villages—options for making a sustainable living.

CWWN offers women workers:

► A cultural space

The “home-like” women workers’ cultural centre, close to Shenzhen airport in Guangdong province,⁵ has the support of progressive health department officials, academics, lawyers, medical practitioners and the general public. It provides women workers with a space away from the factory floor and the dormitory. There

the women read, sing, dance, write, watch movies, take up crafts and photography, and so on; they discuss worker and women’s rights and health and safety, prepare for re-integrating themselves into their rural areas or take up leadership training. Put simply, women migrant workers get together there and learn from each other. The cultural centre is open seven days a week.

► Dormitory-based support networks

CWWN also meets with women workers in the dormitories of ten garment factories. These meetings take place after work, as late as 10 or 11 p.m., with groups of eight to ten women. The topics for discussion—worker and women’s rights, health and safety, rural re-integration, etc.—are agreed beforehand with participants. Training is given to the volunteers willing to be involved in these networks. The network coordinators, though volunteers, take on important responsibilities such as facilitating discussions and building up self-help networks. Two outstanding dormitory coordinators have become full-time, paid CWWN staff. Both have three to four years’ working experience in factories.

► A mobile support unit

CWWN uses a bus converted into a mobile support unit to reach thousands more women workers in the Shenzhen and Pearl River Delta special economic zones. Its outreach team provides free resources on health and welfare, including books and magazines, leaflets, and has a TV, and video and broadcasting equipment on board. It also carries simple equipment to conduct medical check-ups. Coordination of the work of this unit is mostly by migrant workers themselves. It visits three industrial towns a week and is supported by occupational health and safety and other health officials.

► An occupational health and safety centre

This centre, set up in 2002 next to CWWN’s cultural centre with funds raised for occupational health and safety projects, provides a

hot-line on health and safety issues, but focuses primarily on awareness-raising and prevention. It provides education kits and resources to organise support groups. Support groups enable participants to learn about their legal rights to medical insurance and raise awareness about dangerous machinery and other potential hazards in the workplace, and facilitate the assessment of basic safety conditions at shop-floor level. Industrial accidents and occupational diseases are common in small workshops as well as big enterprises, where there is too little education about potential workplace hazards. The centre receives guidance from academics from Sun Yat-Sen and Shenzhen universities. The aim in the long term is for workers to educate each other.

► Social events

The work carried out both in and outside the above structures is consolidated through larger social events on, for instance, Chinese New Year’s Day, International Labour Day and International Women’s Day. While regular group activities (at the centres, in workers’ dormitories, even in hospital wards) are usually limited to 15 persons or less, events during festivals, in the form of outdoor activities or debates for example, can bring together



CWWN-organised training inside a factory, 2004. Labour law, women’s rights, and occupational health are popular topics.

more than 100 workers from different factories. New friends are made and stronger solidarity is built.

► **Expressing themselves through worker committees**

Since 2004, CWWN has been providing training for workers—on labour rights, corporate social responsibility, health and safety, collective bargaining and communication skills—in an effort to promote worker committees. The training aims to enhance worker confidence, improve worker participation in negotiations (on overtime, fringe benefits, etc.), in the monitoring of codes of conduct implementation and the promotion of better communication with factory management. CWWN starts by getting factory management to agree to training sessions for workers and promoting the idea of worker committees as a platform for workers to express their opinions in relation to work. CWWN then guides workers through the nomination and election process. Every worker has the right to vote. CWWN believes that the elections for the worker committees are fairly and openly conducted. The committees are usually 12 to 14 workers strong, each member having precise responsibilities.



Garment worker at a factory in Bao'an district, Shenzhen, reading a novel at CWWN cultural center, where she is a volunteer

Following an evaluation of this system of worker representation, CWWN concluded that the negotiating powers of worker committees need to be stronger and that workers are not yet involved in key areas of decision-making. Despite the difficulties, worker committee members have demonstrated a certain degree of worker solidarity at shop floor level.

► **Campaigning**

CWWN is disseminating the campaign for a living wage initiated by the Committee for Asian Women (CAW). On International Labour Day 2005, CWWN agreed to support a campaign in which nine Asian countries are taking part (Bangladesh, China,

Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, South Korea, and Thailand)—advocating “living wage” policies. When asked what a living wage consists of, migrant women workers told CWWN that their needs include: basic daily needs (food and accommodation; clothes and toiletries), personal savings, sending money to their parents and siblings in the villages, healthcare, planning for marriage, part-time study and emergency fund. They collectively demand a living wage of 800 yuan a month (USD100).⁶

CWWN reports that labour problems are becoming increasingly complex in China in the era of globalisation. Exploitation is intensifying as fewer and fewer companies dominate global markets. Collaboration is needed between a variety of actors—student activists, labour and human rights groups, religious organisations, progressive academics and consumer communities—as the only effective way to address the interlinked problems of social injustice and environmental degradation among others. CWWN’s contribution is to facilitate bottom-up, community-based, worker-oriented organising and so empower Chinese migrant workers.



Workers singing a labour song at a forum organised by migrant workers to discuss global working conditions, 2005

- ¹ From material originally written by Pun Ngai, Merina Fung, Rebecca Lai and other CWWN staff.
- ² Pun Ngai, *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace* (Duke University Press, 2005).
- ³ Because of state laws dictating that those born in the countryside cannot permanently leave their villages (China’s “household registration policy” means that rural migrant workers do not have urban citizenship rights), because young women are under pressure from their families to marry by their late twenties, and above all because these young women undertake physically exhausting work, migrant women workers are transient labour, staying an average of four or five years before returning home.
- ⁴ The magazine is downloadable in Chinese from www.cwwn.org.
- ⁵ Guangdong province, in southern coastal China, is the industrial hub of the country. In 2004, according to the Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, the country attracted US\$60.6 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) of which Guangdong alone absorbed US\$10 billion. Guangdong province is China’s largest production base for garments. It is the most populous of Chinese provinces with over 110 million inhabitants, including more than 31 million migrant workers.
- ⁶ The legal minimum wage was raised from 480 to 580 yuan a month (US\$72) on 1 July 2005 in the Bao’an and Longgang districts of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone.



Junya Lek Yimprasert

Coordinator, Thai Labour Campaign

It was at university that I woke up to the extent of exploitation in Thailand and to the massive gap between rich and poor. I grew up in the countryside, where that gap is not so big. At university, I learned that only 5% of students are from poor families and manage to get through the entrance exam—I was one of the 5%. It's when I realised what little access the poor had to higher education that I became an activist and continued after graduation. I worked with communities on the issue of participatory rights and self-reliance, I worked in social welfare, and I campaigned on labour and migrant worker rights.

Like many other women, I have had to endure my own pains. I have had to fight against the stereotypical views of men and women in Thai society, and against domestic violence that traumatised me for many years, to the point that I once decided to pick up a knife to settle the issue. Fortunately, at the critical moment, I realised that using a knife could lead to my death or land me in jail. I chose non-violence. I believe that we are the ones who determine our own fate. We can do this carefully, creatively, and benefit not just ourselves but also others and society as well.

“I believe that we are the ones who determine our own fate”

The only way to change the situation of workers is to show the human face of these women and challenge mainstream economists for not taking workers' rights into account. We have to challenge terms of employment, guarantee collective bargaining for all and most importantly support women workers' efforts to organise. The Thai Labour Campaign is a non-profit organisation committed to promoting workers' rights in Thailand and to increasing global awareness of labour issues. It was started in February 2000 and is based in Bangkok.

Like many of us, I get inspiration from the thousands of women who all these years have given me strength to do what I do—starting with my mother and sisters, who are all strong, hard working, honest, caring and supportive. They are not rich but they have plenty to give.

I learned from many other women over the years. I am thinking of the sex workers of Ko Samui in Thailand, of Thai and other migrant workers in Hong Kong and Singapore, of the women workers who led the Par Garment Workers' Union, the Almond Workers' Union, the Bed and Bath workers, the Thai Krieng workers; of the Mun River women who sat on a bomb to protest at the construction of the dam, of the sacrifice of women friends in the CCC to bring awareness in the North of the exploitation of workers in the South.

Their encouragement, their support, their smiles, their caring and their stories make me feel privileged. I am lucky to have had the chance to meet them, learn from them and fight with them. I owe much to these women and to the world—and that is what I have to give back by doing what I am doing now.



Lek at demonstration,
South Korea, 1998



Marie-Françoise Le Tallec

Activist, CCC France

I was training to teach physical education in the 1970s but had to give it up for health reasons. I then worked in the food industry (poultry) for twenty-five years before calling it a day. During those years, I always tried to reconcile economic reality with decent social and environmental standards, though it wasn't always easy. Being in a decision-making position, I was able to avoid unfairness (in particular in relation to wages) and help workers, especially women, up the promotion ladder.

Immediately after leaving the company, I started work as a volunteer—not to fill my time but to try and budge the monolith that is economic society. I came across CRISLA (Centre de Réflexion et d'Information sur la Solidarité), a Brittany-based NGO concerned with raising awareness of international development issues and with promoting international solidarity with the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America. CRISLA is involved in fair trade and is a member of the French CCC. I quickly became involved in the campaign myself, especially in last year's Play Fair at the Olympics Campaign. I am interested as an ex-athlete (I competed at national level athletics and handball in the past) and enjoyed the fact that as the Games got nearer, there were so many sporting events to use as an excuse for action!

“It is by taking action in our everyday lives, by provoking consumers to question what they are buying and as they buy, that we will move forward”

As local representative of the national Clean Clothes coalition, my role is to mobilise the team I have brought together, in which women are the most active. On average, the team is aged 45 and over, and all are volunteers except for one trade unionist. They are also active in development NGOs, fair trade, youth groups, etc.

We raise awareness of working conditions in garment and footwear production. It's essential as far as I am concerned to contribute to the construction of a more united society—which puts human beings at the centre of its concerns. It seems to me that it is by taking action in our everyday lives, by provoking consumers to question what they are buying and as they buy, that we will move forward. I aim to provoke consumers to ask questions—so that we can engage in dialogue with retailers, who are in fact the buyers. Consumers often doubt our capacity to bring about change. It's often necessary to explain that change doesn't come easily and that even when it does come, it may take a while before the results are visible.

Women are more sensitive to social justice issues and are therefore easier to mobilise than men. In France, the majority of human right activists are women. Given their reproductive role and their place in society, women understand better than men the need for solidarity and for sharing. NGOs know that and prefer to channel financial support (through micro-credit for instance) through women rather than men.

But my involvement in this movement has probably more to do with the education I received than with any other factor. Though these days I am an atheist, I received a Judaeo-Christian education from my grandmother, the focus of which was responsibility towards others, serving others. The work and the commitment of Théodore Monod¹ also influenced me greatly. I can't conceive of our society continuing to function on the basis of one human being exploited by another. It doesn't have to be that way—but it's up to us to work for a complete shift in attitude.

¹ Théodore Monod (1902-2000), a French scientist and Christian, anti-nuclear activist and vegetarian, defender of human rights, promoter of peace, non-violence and social justice.

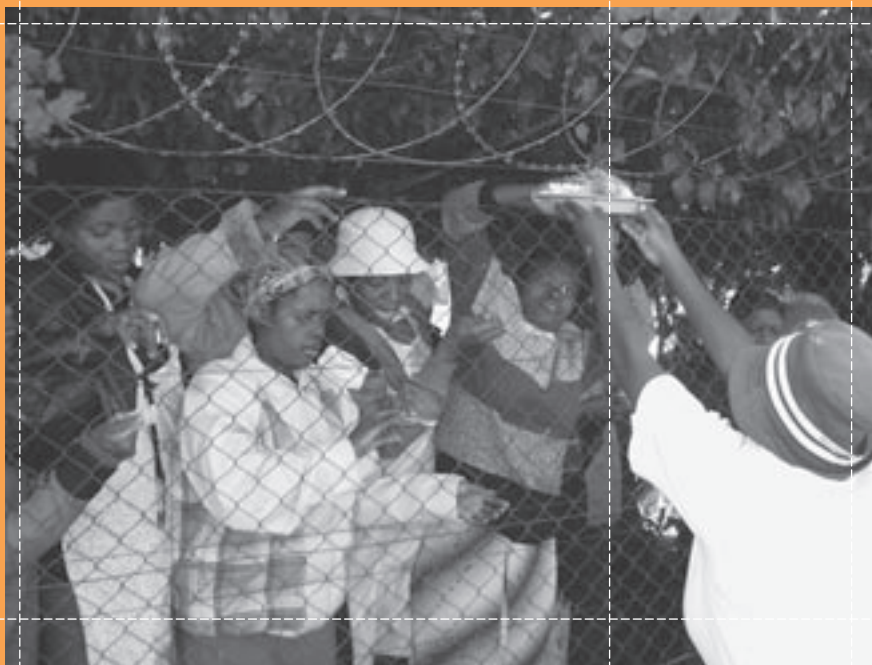


MARTIN WURT/OXFAM AUSTRALIA

Garment workers at their dormitory, Sri Lanka, 2004



Garment workers, not allowed to leave the premises during their lunch break at the Tuntex factory buy food over barbed wire fence, Swaziland, 2005



Sick and Tired

The Impact of Gender Roles on Garment Workers' Health

Maggie Robbins and Kathleen Vickery

Working conditions in garment factories are notoriously dehumanising for all workers, regardless of gender. Men and women typically work long hours for very low pay. They are often exposed to dust and toxic chemicals in noisy, crowded rooms with poor ventilation and lighting. Due to poor ergonomics, job design and overwork, men and women garment workers are both at risk of strain and overuse injuries. These and other risks, however, are not gender equal. Women garment workers face different and often greater health risks than men in the same workplace due to differences in gender-based roles and expectations.

In most places, young women are recruited and hired for garment work precisely because of social perceptions about their skills, abilities, female temperament, and duty to obey male superiors. In the eyes of the boss, a “good” garment worker is docile, tireless, and naturally suited to performing repetitive work with her hands. This work is not considered dangerous, in part because it does not look physically demanding, and also because the harm it causes is often not visible. Women may endure discomfort and even great pain for a

long time if they have been taught to believe that pain is normal. When women do speak up, they may be rebuked by men who believe that women should remain silent. Women often do remain silent, because they have been conditioned not to say what they feel and because they know they will be ignored or punished. Employers, health and safety officials, and even medical personnel do not always take women seriously when they report common injuries and illnesses caused by garment work.

This article briefly describes the most common threats to health experienced by women garment workers because they are women. It also highlights examples of women organising for better working conditions and healthier communities.

Poverty—the number one risk to health

Although women make up the majority of garment workers, in most places they earn less than men, even for equal work as skilled operators. Women are often simply excluded from higher-paid jobs, as well as opportunities for training



and promotion, because of gender norms long-entrenched in societies where “women’s work” is not valued, and where heads-of-household and public decision-makers have traditionally all been men. These roles carry over into the workplace where they have a serious impact on the health and well-being of women workers and their families.

Wage discrimination means that women are more likely to be malnourished and to lack decent housing, access to health care, and community services such as clean water and sanitation. Wage discrimination also means that women must work longer and harder to make ends meet, leading to exhaustion and injuries from stress and overwork, illness as a result of lowered immune systems, and longer recovery from injury or illness.



Blocked walkway in garment factory, Lesotho, 2001

Women’s workplace needs denied

Tools, machines and factory furniture are rarely designed with women workers in mind. Poor ergonomics—how well a job task fits a worker’s body—combined with long hours and unrelenting pressure to meet production quotas lead to eye strain, fatigue and debilitating overuse injuries that often go undiagnosed and untreated. Rather than adapting tools and tasks to prevent injuries, bosses routinely ignore worker complaints of pain and discomfort, and fire workers who can no longer keep up with production. Workers may also be fired for taking time off to get medical care or to recover from an injury or illness. In December 2002, during overnight work, the snap machine used for placing buttons on clothes caught the right thumbnail of Mon, a sewer at SGD Corporation in Angono in Rizal (Philippines). Mon, 35, used her teeth to remove the button from her nail only to find that the machine had dug a hole in her thumb.

“Take two Amoxicillin tablets and get back to work,” her supervisor told her after she asked for help. “When there are orders for immediate shipment, you can’t refuse to work overnight even if you’re not feeling well,” Mon said. Three days after, the same machine caught her left finger even as her thumb was still swollen and throbbed with pain.¹

In many factories, workers are not given clean water to drink nor are they allowed to use the toilet when they need to. These restrictions are especially harmful to women’s health. Women are more vulnerable than men to bladder infections if they do not drink enough liquid or urinate often enough. Women also need regular access to clean toilets with soap and water to stay healthy during menstruation and pregnancy, but these needs are ignored in many garment factories. Of 23 factories visited in Southern Africa by the Clean Clothes Campaign in 2002 reports on, almost half mentioned access to toilets as being reports on an issue. One factory had toilets open only at certain times during the day—and had only one toilet pass per line of 45 workers; another did not allow visits to the toilets at the end of the working day; another had one toilet for women workers, one for men workers and one for management—for a total of 920 workers; yet another recorded how often the women went to the toilets and how long they stayed.² Indonesian workers reported having to wear dark clothing while menstruating because they knew that during the long working hours and with limited access to toilets, blood would leak through their clothes.³

Employer control over women’s sexuality and reproductive health

For many young women, even poorly paid factory jobs offer an unprecedented opportunity for social and economic independence. This does not mean, however, that they wish to abandon opportunities to marry and have children. But in many places women—and only women—are forced to make this choice to get and keep jobs. Employer control over women’s sexuality and decisions about childbearing is often a condition of employment.

In some garment factories, women applying for work are asked if they are married, going out with men, planning to have children, and using birth control. Sometimes they must pay to have a pregnancy test. Women who are pregnant or refuse the test are not hired. Some employers will only hire unmarried women with no children, and some make each woman sign an agreement not to give

birth as long as she works at the factory. In some factories, woman workers must show soiled pads or cloths every month to prove they are not pregnant. Women garment workers commonly have to undergo forced pregnancy testing in Central America.⁶ In one factory in the northeast state of Coahuila in Mexico, women workers underwent forced pregnancy tests at the time of hiring and every two months thereafter.

These practices violate women’s rights to equal employment and to make their own decisions about pregnancy, and also have serious consequences for the health of women workers and their children. Workers who become pregnant may try to hide their condition as long as possible, resulting in lack of adequate nutrition, poor prenatal care, and potential exposure to work hazards that can cause birth defects, premature birth, low-weight babies and other health problems.

The reproductive health of both men and women workers, and their children, may be harmed by exposure to toxic chemicals, heat, noise, overwork and exhaustion. In factories where pregnant workers are allowed to keep their jobs, they may still be required to work in an unsafe environment, although they are often pressured to quit so the employer does not have to pay for maternity leave and benefits required by law. In China, pregnant footwear factory workers have been fired to avoid the payment of maternity benefits.⁴ In Guatemala, a pregnant garment worker was fired because “she would no longer be able to work extra hours, could not be made to stand for long periods of time and would not be able to work as hard as other workers.”⁵

Reported harassment of pregnant workers includes verbal abuse, higher production quotas, longer work hours and more difficult jobs, such as standing instead of sitting or transfer to a hotter work area. Philippino trade unions report that pregnant workers were forced to work overtime, including at night, in the free trade zone of Cavite, while a woman worker in another garment factory had a miscarriage inside a company comfort room after being forbidden to take leave. According to

the report, garment factory bosses were also known to forbid workers from taking maternity leave or pay if they wanted to return to work after the baby's birth.⁷ Similarly, the ICFTU reports in 2003 that while they are legally entitled to three months' maternity leave, Indonesian women workers are fired if they do take leave.⁸

The second shift

Before and after long days and nights in the factory, many women workers continue to fulfill their gender role as unpaid caregivers of children and other family members. Even when a man in a woman's household is unemployed, he may refuse to cook, clean, provide child care or do other kinds of "women's work." The additional responsibility for others' welfare takes a heavy toll on women workers' physical and emotional health. Social norms and many of the policies in force in most garment factories contribute to the burden.

Employers usually do not provide conditions on site for breastfeeding or child care. In a survey of workers at nine Nike contract factories in Indonesia (seven footwear, one apparel, one equipment and accessories), more than half of the 4,000 workers surveyed said that child care was an important issue to them, though none of the factories provided any day care services.⁹

"Those of our friends who have children are sorry that they never get time to spend with them and watch them grow," says Laila, who works in an Indonesian factory producing for six major sportswear brands. A worker in another Indonesian factory adds: "When there are stretches of overtime, those workers who have children just don't get to see them. The children are already asleep when they come home from work and still asleep when the women leave in the morning."¹⁰

Sri Lankan Union Pushes for Safe Transport

A union organising workers in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone in Sri Lanka surveyed the women workers in the boarding-house community next to the zone. A common worry of the women was their safety going to and from work late at night. There was a lot of violence and rape in the community. The union organisers then talked with the women about ways to prevent the violence. Together, they decided on several things. One of the solutions was to get bus transportation between the factories and the boarding houses. The workers and the union got the local government to buy a bus to start this service. This worked very well, so the union asked the factory owners in the zone to buy two more buses. The women still worked long hours, but they were very pleased to have buses to ride instead of walking up to three kilometres (one and a half miles) between their homes and the factories.

Long and irregular working hours make it difficult for women to make plans and meet multiple demands on their time. The combined pressures of factory work and responsibilities at home often lead to stress-related illnesses, including depression, headaches, ulcers, high blood pressure and fatigue. Krishanti, a 28-year old worker in a Bangkok garment factory reports: "Sometimes, we have to work a night shift on top of a day shift. It upsets the normal body functioning. I work like a machine, not a human being."¹¹

Some of these pressures can be relieved by making changes in the community. Women's time and labour at home are affected more than men's by lack of clean water, sanitation, electricity, and other services. Organised women's groups often raise the need for transportation routes and schedules that make it safer and easier for them to travel between work, home, shopping, and other activities. They also advocate for expanded hours or more convenient locations of stores, health clinics, and other services.

Harassment and violence

Violence is frequently threatened or used against workers by supervisors, employers, the police, state security forces, strike breakers and others to enforce the systematic violation of workers' rights. Men and women are often harassed, beaten, and sometimes killed for organising and demanding better working conditions.

In addition, women workers are frequently subjected to humiliating searches, verbal and physical abuse, and sexual harassment on the job, as well as the constant threat of assault and rape in their communities. In a factory producing for Levi Strauss in Sandanski (Bulgaria), reporters interviewed workers who testified to body searches, quoting one woman worker who had been fired for refusing to remove her clothes.¹² At a factory visited by the CCC in Lesotho, women workers reported being searched (by women) every day when leaving the factory. Some women were forced to take off their clothes and menstruating women had to remove their pads to show that



Woman working in inappropriate chair in badly lit factory, Lesotho, 2001

they were not stealing anything. Several women from this factory were raped as they walked home from late overtime work—but management still refused to provide transport for workers finishing late.¹³ Indonesian women workers report that "pretty girls in the factory are always harassed by the male managers. They come on to the girls, call them into their offices, whisper into their ears, touch them (...), bribe them with money and threaten them with losing their jobs to have sex with them".¹⁴ As a result of this systematic, gender-based violence, women workers all over the world are exposed to a range of injuries and emotional, stress-related illnesses that do not affect men.

Organising for women's health and safety

In many garment factories and the communities around them, gender roles are rapidly shifting ahead of social norms. This gap between, on the one hand, attitudes and beliefs about men's and women's respective rights, abilities and status in the community, and on the other, the conditions in which workers live and work, is both a site of conflict and an opportunity for more equitable gender relationships.

Worker solidarity in export factories often begins with struggles around women's health issues, such as the right to use the bathroom or freedom from sexual harassment. Because groups of women workers are usually challenging an order imposed and enforced by a group of men, each demand or act of resistance is generally also a challenge to prescribed gender roles.

In the best of circumstances, women make themselves heard, the men around them listen, and both begin to regard women's needs and point of view with greater respect.

Mexican Women Make Workplace Healthier

Yolanda works in a large garment factory in Piedras Negras, Mexico. After years of enduring difficult working conditions, one day Yolanda and her co-workers decided they had to do something about the fabric dust that completely covered them after just a few hours of work. The ceiling fans just blew the dust around and the loose paper masks were not enough protection and hot to wear. "If we're covered with this stuff on the outside, imagine what we look like on the inside", said one of the workers. "I have to wipe my face every few minutes". When the factory brought in a new manager, the women decided to push for changes.

Yolanda agreed to work for a while without wiping the dust off her face. By 11 a.m., she was covered with a fine blue fuzz from the trousers she was sewing. The workers went together to speak with the manager. "You said you didn't want to see sad faces in the factory... What do you think of this?" Seeing Yolanda's blue face, the manager turned bright red with embarrassment. The women told him: "We need ventilation at each of our sewing machines to pull the dust outside". He said he would see what the company could afford. "When will we see the ventilation?" the women insisted. "Whose idea was this?" he demanded. The women replied simply: "Everyone's". Realising the women were going to stick together, he agreed to install three ventilators each week until the entire production line had them.

The women in Yolanda's factory continued demanding and winning changes, including better treatment for pregnant women. They formed a union and learned the law. Through direct actions, they have forced their boss to obey laws such as those on maternity leave and end-of-year bonuses.

Workers are continuously challenging attitudes and stereotypes and are organising in various ways to defend their rights and demand fair pay and recognition as wage earners, equal pay for equal work, safer working conditions, and an end to discrimination, harassment and violence.

Within most unions and other worker support organisations, women must also challenge long-standing barriers to their full participation and leadership. Campaigns for workers' rights and health and safety cannot respond to the needs of all workers unless women workers are directly involved in setting priorities and making decisions about strategies and actions.

Finally, the health and safety of women garment workers also depends on government accountability, not just for enforcing labour laws and standards, but for upholding women's human rights, increasing women's opportunities for education and political participation, and ending violence against women.

¹ [Http://www.tucp.org.ph/projects/sweatshops/index.htm](http://www.tucp.org.ph/projects/sweatshops/index.htm).

² *Made in Southern Africa*, Clean Clothes Campaign, 2002. This publication was the outcome of research carried out by SOMO and the Trade Union Research Project in Southern Africa between 2000 and 2002.

The two sidebars to this feature article are from a forthcoming book on health and workers organising in export factories. The Hesperian Foundation encourages others to copy, reproduce or adapt the material it publishes, provided it is then distributed free or at cost—not for profit.

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Board with hourly and daily production targets, Malawi, 2003

³ "Labour Rights in Indonesia: What is Menstruation Leave?" *Clean Clothes* newsletter, No. 13, November 2000.

⁴ For example at Lizhan Footwear Factory, Guangdong. See Kernaghan, Charles (2000) "Made in China: The Role of U.S. Companies in Denying Human and Worker Rights," May, National Labor Committee, New York. p. 54.

⁵ See <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/guat/>.

⁶ See www.maquilasolidarity.org/resources/garment/hay-stack/4-vignettes.pdf.

⁷ Asserting workers' rights in Philippines sweatshops, KMP (Trade Union Congress of the Philippines), November 2003.

⁸ www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/East_and_South_East_Asia_Regional_Research_Rep.pdf. p. 35.

⁹ CSDS (2001) "Workers' Voices: An Interim Report of Workers' Needs and Aspirations in Nine Nike Contract Factories in Indonesia," Global Alliance for Workers and Communities, p. 50.

¹⁰ *Play Fair at the Olympics—respect workers' rights in the sportswear industry*, Oxfam International, Clean Clothes Campaign and Global Unions (2004), p. 20.

¹¹ *Play Fair at the Olympics—respect workers' rights in the sportswear industry*, p. 19.

¹² *Sunday Times*, London, Sept. 26, 1999. PODKREPA, the Bulgarian Trade Union Federation, confirmed these charges and related their information to Levi Strauss. As a result of the investigation and a visit from Levi Strauss representatives, the situation for workers improved.

¹³ *Made in Southern Africa*, p. 88, 92.

¹⁴ *Play Fair at the Olympics—respect workers' rights in the sportswear industry*, p. 24.



Rohini Hensman

Researcher and writer

At the age of nine, I was displaced, along with my family, by anti-Tamil pogroms in Sri Lanka, but we were also rescued and sheltered by Sinhalese neighbours and friends. That experience taught me to fight against the artificial division of human beings by mutually exclusive ethnic, religious, cultural and national identities. Combating the division of workers along such lines in India and Sri Lanka is a fight that I am still involved in.

Growing up in a Marxist, anti-imperialist family, I learned about class exploitation and imperialist oppression. As a student in Oxford in the late 1960s, I was involved in the anti-Vietnam war movement and, thirty-five years later, am still campaigning against the same imperialism, hopefully now in decline. It was also in Oxford that I first got involved with the trade union movement, an involvement which continues in India today in the form of participation in the Union Research Group (a non-funded voluntary group) and the Trade Union Solidarity Committee, a coordination of independent unions in Bombay.

“The women I most admire... continue to sustain their own lives and the lives of others in the grimmest of circumstances”

The first political awareness I can remember, however, is anger at the oppression of children. That concern remains with me, in the form of campaigns against child labour and the use of children as child soldiers.

My daughter was born in 1971, and my son in 1974, both a source of great joy. But the almost unmanageable workload that weighed me down when they were little is what drew me to feminism and made me begin research into the incredibly hard lives of women workers in India and Sri Lanka. That research brought me into contact with Women Working Worldwide, with whom I continue to work till today. I hope that this association will continue, since it draws together so many of my concerns so well.

Today, I am trying to use my skills in research and writing (both fiction and non-fiction) to contribute to all the causes I have listed above. In particular, I am trying to understand and analyse the sweeping changes globalisation has brought about in the world, so that movements for social justice can respond in ways that are more coherent than the current responses.

The women I most admire are those I have come across in my research. They are mostly perceived as victims, and it is true that some of them sink beneath the weight of the huge problems they face. But most of them continue to sustain their own lives and the lives of others in the grimmest of circumstances. My two novels are really tributes to these unsung heroines: *To Do Something Beautiful* to the working women (and men) of Bombay who retain

their resilience, generosity and sense of humour despite poverty and overwork, *Playing Lions and Tigers* to the women (and men) in Sri Lanka who kept alive the values of solidarity, love and compassion while surrounded by hatred and violence. Their courage is a source of hope for all of us.



Collage, made of images provided by CAW staff and network groups, for a poster produced by CAW



CAW representatives join Thai Durable union leaders at demonstration at Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Seoul, S. Korea, 2000

The Committee for Asian Women

“CAW helps build sisterhood, which lasts a lifetime.”
Supawadee

It is the struggle of women workers against exploitation and social injustice which led to the formation of the Committee for Asian Women (CAW) over 25 years ago. The need was for an organisation that would support women workers in their struggle for better working and living conditions—at a time when the women’s, labour and human rights movements were not necessarily interested in hearing the voices of women workers. CAW was also about bringing mutual understanding between groups that perceived themselves as competing for the same work: young against older workers, single workers against workers with children, country against country.

According to CAW founders, the Catholic church was the first to publicly note in the 1970s the poor working conditions that prevailed in the garment and electronic industries of South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. All but Hong Kong (then under British rule) were under dictatorships. Their governments put little store in the rights of workers employed in factories which they had sought hard to attract through tax ex-

emptions, the provision of industrial sites, the promotion of cheap and docile labour and an all too lax implementation of labour legislation.

The Catholic church, while on evangelising missions among poor neighbourhoods which were home to factory workers, soon realised the extent of the exploitation. Visits to Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong and South Korea showed that the problems were the same everywhere. Meetings were held, contacts made, mostly in secret—and a first, church-sponsored regional meeting took place in 1977 in the Philippines in Manila.¹ It is at that meeting that the church was asked to take action, which led to the creation in 1979 of a women workers’ desk. From this initiative, CAW was born in 1981.

Under the umbrella of the church, CAW was part of an ecumenical programme to reach women workers and groups that represented their interests. All but one member of its first board were nuns. This greatly facilitated international activities, at least when these were not too openly connected with labour issues. It was the church umbrella for instance which made it possible to organise worker training in Taiwan—even though

the trainer who organised the event was threatened and warned not to come back. Contact was made with church workers and church groups, these networking activities often being conducted underground.

By the early 1980s, links had been established with groups in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, countries that by then were also attracting foreign investment. Some of these groups were militant and ideologically motivated, for instance in South Korea, others, in Singapore for instance, were more conservative. Apart from network building, CAW conducted sector-based consultations (a garment consultation in the Philippines in 1980, an electronics consultation in Malaysia in 1981, a rural workers' consultation in Bangladesh in 1982) and began making contacts beyond Asia.

Partly due to training provided by CAW, women workers in the 1980s began to become more visible. Women had more opportunities to travel and exchange experiences and knowledge; trade unions were beginning to invite women as speakers; there were more women in positions of leadership. CAW itself was, by all accounts, a very open organisation, democratically run, with room for participation by all. There was "little bureaucracy and politicking", "much commitment" and "tears and laughter".²

In those years, inspiration came primarily from what was happening in the Philippines and South Korea. Groups working for the empowerment of women were appearing in both countries, the most successful of which managed to put women workers' demands on the national agenda. Philippino and South Korean contacts of CAW were deeply involved in these activities and groups—in the formation for instance of GABRIELA³ in the Philippines. And it was CAW that spread knowledge of these examples and communicated their inspirational power (the media had no interest in labour issues and internet was still years away).

The recession of the mid-1980s brought women workers' struggles to the forefront, a new prominence which led to a severe crackdown in Malaysia. Many of the women involved saw the struggle for their rights as being inseparable from the struggle for democracy.

By then it had become clear that independence from the church was necessary if the organisation was to be more gender-oriented. The church had played its role in highlighting labour issues but failed to appreciate their gendered aspect. It continued, however, to provide crucial financial support. The new CAW recognised the part played by gender in exploitative relationships and processes. Attention was drawn to employers' treatment of pregnant workers, who mostly preferred to avoid paying maternity benefits than sustain employment relationships with workers; to married workers and workers with children who, because it was felt that their place was in the home, had to be content with whatever work and working conditions they got; to older workers, also expected to make do with whatever work they were given; to the fact that for a number of gendered reasons, women were having to put up with insecure work, lower pay and no benefits.

CAW built links with women's groups, women worker organisers and individual women. Existing network members were encouraged to link up with groups in the women's movement. A feminist perspective was built into workshops, conferences, meetings.

It was common to come across activists having to make the difficult choice between marrying and giving up activism or staying single and continuing. And it wasn't easy to stay single in the 1980s—there would have been great pressure from families and friends to marry.

By the late 1980s, CAW had network members in most East, South and South East Asian countries. Although its structure had been formalised and close relationships developed with most network groups, the non-hierarchical set-up was maintained.

In the early 1990s, CAW focused on leadership training—so women could lead unions or form women's unions; on highlighting, with publications such as "As women as workers", the impact of globalisation on women workers; and on organising regional and sub-regional exchanges, involving South Korea, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Philippines so the various groups that made up the network could get to know each other better. "Do you hate us," asked Indonesian women garment workers, "for taking your jobs away?"

CAW also began to conduct research. It was becoming clear that employer-employee relationships were changing; subcontracting was making the identification of employers more difficult. The research revealed the extent of informalisation of working patterns, with the result that in the late 1990s, CAW was one of the first organisations to extend its work among informal workers. Exchanges were organised, with for instance informal worker union SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) in India; "Dolls and Dust", a documentary showing women workers how restructuring and globalisation was affecting them, was produced.

By the mid 1990s, women everywhere were working hard to organise themselves. They organised to demand their rights, in particular, during the Asian financial and economic crisis, back pay and severance pay owed to them. Many women had to go from formal to informal working arrange-

ments, with the consequent loss of bargaining power. In 1998, CAW launched a campaign to demand recognition of the rights of part-time workers and home-workers, and the ratification of the ILO's new convention on home-working. Paradoxically, it was becoming politically correct to demand respect of women's rights yet women workers everywhere were becoming more marginalized, losing jobs and becoming decidedly poorer.

In 2000, CAW moved from Hong Kong to Bangkok. The aftermath of the Asian crisis, which led to the closure of many factories in the garment as well as other sectors, focused the organisation's work on solidarity and support at all levels. CAW for the first time took the issue of women workers' rights to an ASEM (Asia-Europe meeting) meeting: the case of Thai Durable Textiles⁴ made such an impact that the Thai government intervened immediately to resolve the situation. An international workshop on informalisation, to help strategise, was organised in South Korea in 2000, which revealed that the problem exists everywhere. Work has since continued on informal work.

This profile was compiled from Moving Mountains—25 Years of Perseverance, CAW's 25th anniversary publication.

¹ The governments of Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia and Singapore, however, did not allow their nationals to attend.

² *Moving Mountains—25 Years of Perseverance*, by Committee for Asian Women (2002).

³ Founded in 1984, GABRIELA is a national alliance of more than 250 women's organisations and groups in the Philippines dealing with the problems of women as women, working to free women from economic and political oppression and from discrimination, sexual violence and abuse, neglect and denial of their health and reproductive rights.

⁴ CCC reference.



Ineke Zeldenrust

Coordinator, CCC International Secretariat

I got involved in this because I was an activist, and I stayed involved because I want to remain one. I took inspiration from the Southern feminist critique of development that came out at the time of the NGO Forum held parallel to the Third UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985. More specifically I think it was the Indian economist Devaki Jain, one of the founders of DAWN,¹ who called upon activists in the North to pressure “their” multinationals for their role in what was going wrong at the macro-economic level.

For me the garment industry provided a thematic crossroads to issues like women’s labour, globalisation of production, the power of transnationals and international solidarity, all of which had become important to me during my involvement in the Amsterdam activist movement in the eighties. It also provided a framework for working with organisations of different political persuasions and style, which became very important to me in the nineties. CCC gives me the opportunity to be a professional activist, and by that I not only mean to get paid for what I do but also to work in an environment where I can keep learning new things, developing my skills and last but not least working with interesting and highly competent other people from all over the world. Many of them I can only describe as colleagues/friends—or friends/colleagues as they are both—which for me is one of the nicest parts of the job.

“I’m still amazed at how far we’ve come with essentially no more than a group of determined women (and some men) and a good concept: the story behind the garment that everyone wears”

I want to be part of an effective movement for social change, and CCC at its best gives the best of both worlds: an activist life at a highly professional level. Of course there are also drawbacks: the endless search for funds, the frustrations of limited resources, the constant pressure since we can ALWAYS do more and there is NEVER enough time, the inherent stress of a network job (there is always someone disagreeing with the strategy) etc. etc. In a way though it is these very same drawbacks that force us to constantly re-invent ourselves, and though this is very tiring, it also means my job keeps changing and developing in new directions.

The main thing though is that I do believe we’re making a difference, and in a way I’m still amazed at how far we’ve come with essentially no more than a group of determined women (and some men) and a good concept: the story behind the garment that everyone wears. Who made it, how, who profits, what changes do the workers want, and what should happen to realise them. Simple, right? All you need is some good information. Looking back, developing our knowledge base has been one of our biggest challenges, but by now it is one of our main strengths.

I think we subconsciously made some other good choices. Developing a very open, structurally loose and non-hierarchical network in which every national coalition of partner organisations has, for example, to pay its own way. I believe this has created space for creativity, has forced us to constantly clarify, debate and re-evaluate our strategies and has kept the campaigns grounded both in the “production” and in the “consumption” countries.

I believe this also lies at the heart of our gender composition (a majority of women throughout): the non-hierarchical structure creates both a “safe space” since the collective is more important than individual leadership, and also gives women an opportunity to excel and make their own way.

I’m not sure about the extent to which women’s place in society has changed, but I do think women’s place in the labour movement has changed over the years. There’s more room in mainstream unions and labour organisations to work with different cultures and styles, and those would include women-led or women-oriented groups. However, there is the next big shift to accomplish—the one towards female leadership of the garment and textile workers’ unions. Male trade union leaders will by and large still speak about women workers’ rights and needs, including gender-specific rights like pregnancy leave, they are still unable to consider these as an integral part of workers’ rights and to speak of them as our rights. In the labour movement as a whole I believe we’re still stuck in an old-fashioned organising model that doesn’t answer to the needs, including the organising needs, of women workers. Developing and actually implementing different strategies, including appropriate ways for the movement at a global level to support these processes and act in true solidarity, on a case-by-case basis and via pro-active, global campaigns should be our top priority in the coming five years.

¹ Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, a network of Southern feminists and activists working for economic and gender justice and political transformation.



Cristina Torafing

Chairperson, Innabuyog-Metro chapter GABRIELA

I first became involved when working with the Women Workers' Program in Baguio City, in Northern Philippines, in 1994. I was then 28 years old with two sons aged five and three. Before the children were born, I had been an organiser among the urban poor communities in Baguio City. After five years as a full-time mother, I decided to continue working and to become part of the women's movement. That was when the Tapweaves' Union, a union of garment workers in a factory owned by a local businesswoman, started a strike against union busting, low wages and non-payment of benefits which lasted two years, the longest in the region.

The Women Workers' Program provided education on basic workers' and women's rights, the role of trade unions, that sort of thing. Workers held meetings to discuss the development of the strike and negotiations with management. They also spent time building alliances in order to gain support from other local unions, organizations and sectors. A livelihood project was set up as an additional source of income for workers on the picket line, which later developed into a cooperative for those who lost their jobs.

"Women's voices are unheard and women are under-represented in political institutions"

Since then, I have become aware of the violence, the repression and restrictions that affect the lives of women, socially and politically, in Filipino society. Women's voices are unheard and women are under-represented in political institutions. There is very little democratic space for the interest of those oppressed in our society, women included, to prevail. The law is biased in favour of men; the judiciary system is inaccessible to the poor and marginalised; the military is an instrument of the state and sexual violence is commonly perpetrated against women. These are among the challenges of organising, education and training, research, advocacy and campaign work. At present, our regional women's federation, INNABUYOG-GABRIELA, is working with garment workers in Baguio City Economic Zone. I myself organise women garment workers.

Organising workers means going to their houses after work, on days off or when they are laid off. The workers usually rent rooms in the residential houses near the factories. We are not allowed inside the factories in the economic zone.

There are two levels of organising. The first is building contacts with workers. We introduce ourselves and explain what we have to offer—seminars or assistance in organising. Then we begin to discuss workplace issues. If the response is positive, we go back again and again until we feel we can invite them to seminars. Of ten workers, maybe only one or two will respond positively. Most of them don't speak about work or the company and would be frightened at the mention of trade unions. The second level is organising among workers we have known for a while. We go to their houses regularly and talk with them often. They share their situation and conditions with us. We also talk of more personal matters. They introduce us to fellow workers or friends and help us recruit and make new contacts.

There are new opportunities opening up for women. One is the passing of the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act in 2004. This legislation is a milestone as it now recognises that violence against women and children is a crime and offers legal options for its victims. Another is the Anti-Sexual Harassment Law, which enables women employees to protect themselves from sexual harassment at the hands of their superiors.

The women's movement, which is active all over the country, is probably the most important means for women to defend and assert their rights. Twenty years old and now under the banner of GABRIELA, this national movement has brought numerous gains and victories, not only on gender issues but on others of wider interest.

My life is also my work so if I speak about my work, I am also speaking about myself. I have been an organiser for almost ten years. I will continue since the situation of trade unions and workers is deteriorating in the face of globalisation. At present, I am chairperson of Innabuyog-Metro chapter of GABRIELA, which is based in Baguio City. I live with my husband and three kids who are still young and going to school. My husband is also a volunteer organiser among youth and students in Baguio City.



SHARON JONES

Producing garments at home, El Alto, Bolivia



Sewing bedsheets, Lithuania

The Shifting Patterns of Women's Work

Informalisation Sweeps the Global Garment Industry

Nina Ascoly and Chantal Finney

The concept of an informal economy was introduced in the 1970s to distinguish between wage-earners and self-employment. The expectation was that informal work would develop and be absorbed into formal economic activity. Thirty years later, informal employment is on the increase throughout the world, including in so-called developed countries, and formal employment is daily being lost to the informal economy.

According to the ICFTU, a quarter of the world's working population is active in the informal economy and generates 35% of global GDP.¹ Yet informal economy workers are not recognised or protected under legal and regulatory frameworks and are highly vulnerable. They often have no wage agreements, earn significantly less than formally employed workers, are not paid on time, have no employment contracts, no regular working hours and are not covered by non-wage benefits such as health insurance or unemployment benefits.² So far, their working conditions have not been a priority for most governmental, political or labour organisations. They are mostly women.

A variety of informal working arrangements

While orders for garments are sent to an increasingly concentrated number of agents or companies, these are distributed to many more suppliers, who in turn distribute work to a large network of subcontractors. Many of these subcontractors operate in the informal economy: under pressure to remain competitive, they see informalisation as an important way to cut costs.

Traditionally, informal economy garment workers have included:

- ▷ homeworkers whose employment relationship with an employer is not recognised or protected;
- ▷ homeworkers who have no employers, get their own inputs, manufacture and find their own, mostly local markets; and
- ▷ those who, for various reasons, run a micro-enterprise which they cannot convert into a formally-operating enterprise—and the workers within them.



Home-based garment workshop, Belgrade, Serbia, 2005

But informal work is increasingly extending into regular, formally-operating garment factories. Research into sub-contracting chains commissioned by UK CCC member Women Working Worldwide found the following working arrangements:³

- ▷ work subcontracted to small workshops or homeworkers. Workers often did not have contracts. Factory supervisors acted as agents distributing work outside the factory. Some workers did not receive the income or benefits prescribed by law;
- ▷ workers hired for short-term work—but employed by an agent or a company other than the one running the factory. Unlike workers supplied by an employment agency, these workers are rarely legally employed. They may be required to specifically work night shifts and may receive lower wages than those permanently employed;
- ▷ a new company set up within an existing factory, recruiting workers who may or may not have received the same pay and benefits as other workers.

Instances have also been found of workers operating in garment factories that have supposedly been shut down, where they worked without legal protection and were not paid the legal minimum wage.⁴

As informalisation takes on new forms and becomes more invasive, the differences between formal and informal economic activity become blurred.

Gendered processes push women into the informal economy

Informal economy garment workers are often migrants (internal or from other countries) or from minority groups, often unaware of their legal and labour rights and of how their work fits into (global) supply chains. Sometimes they are former or even current (formally-employed) factory workers. The vast majority are women whose contribution is not

recognised because they are stitching garments or gluing shoes together from home or in an illegal workshop, or because their factory simply has not given them a proper employment contract.

In many societies, women are seen as supplementary earners rather than “real” workers, who will therefore accept lower wages and less formal working arrangements than their male counterparts. As part-time or temporary workers whose “real” work is seen as reproductive (as carers, homemakers, etc.), it is often culturally acceptable to propel them in and out of paid work. Women workers themselves, because they do not see themselves as important or equal to men, do not always challenge these practices.

Gendered biases about whether or not married or pregnant women or women with children should be employed (because they have too many other responsibilities and cannot give 100% to their paid jobs, or because they will be entitled to additional benefits) are commonly used to push women out of formal work.

- ▷ Pregnancy testing has been used in the Philippines to prevent soon-to-be mothers from accessing employment;⁵
- ▷ Indonesian employers employ women as casual labourers so as not to be liable to pay benefits such as maternity pay;⁶
- ▷ Pregnant workers in footwear factories in Guangdong in China have been fired to avoid the payment of benefits.⁷
- ▷ Women over 25 years old are usually not employed in the footwear factories (and most labor-intensive manufacturing industries) of China.⁸

Women in the informal economy are therefore often women with—or of an age to have—caring responsibilities.

Poverty is of course a powerful incentive for women to enter into informal working arrangements—in spite of reduced earnings and diminished rights. In a study on women embroidery homeworkers in the Philippines, the women said their productive work was crucial for the survival

of their families—either as a “big help” or as the main source of income.⁹ Yet while women might be significant earners for their families, gender bias sometimes prevents them from being socially or legally recognised as such. In South Korea, women who are the main earners for their families are not recognised as such if their husbands live with them and are denied the benefits to which a (male) breadwinner is entitled.

Some argue that informal working arrangements are particularly suited to women workers, for the very reason that the flexibility these arrangements imply better accommodates their reproductive responsibilities.¹⁰

Some women homeworkers do report positive aspects to working from home. In the Philippines, homeworkers saw the benefits as: “earning income while near their children and inside their homes, using the skills traditionally taught to women such as sewing and embroidery, and gaining self-respect and self confidence because of their earnings.” Their own income “has provided them a sense of entitlement to make purchases for their own needs (as opposed to collective family needs) and improved their bargaining position vis-à-vis their husbands/ partners.”¹¹ Garment industry homeworkers in Dongguan, China (who are urban residents rather than rural migrant workers), reported that they found “working at home freer than working in factories.”¹²

But generally, the cost in terms of reduced earnings, job insecurity, lack of legal coverage and, for homeworkers, isolation, is high. Although women workers may perceive themselves as benefiting from the opportunity to work from home, this perception is a measure of how limited their options are in the first place. Economically, they need to work. But little is done, by society or by employers, to help reconcile parental and other caring responsibilities with the responsibilities of workers. Women enter the informal economy for the same reasons that they migrate for work: out of a need to survive, not out of choice.

Employers are not the only ones to blame for the poverty and insecurity which typify informal employment. Increasingly, retailers' purchasing practices, in relation to price and delivery times, are making demands which it would be difficult to meet without having recourse to a cheaper and more "flexible" workforce. According to Oxfam International, production times in the Sri Lankan garment industry fell from 90 to 45 days between 2001 and 2004 and the prices paid to some suppliers decreased by 35% between 2001 and 2003.¹³ Government policies meanwhile aim to make their labour force more "flexible" in order to meet retailers' "needs". One labour inspector in Bangalore's garment industry told researchers that "instructions had been received from above to be lenient in inspections as these factories are contributing to the economic growth of the state."¹⁴

It is women who pay the cost of such policies and practices.



Home-based garment workers in Tamil Nadu discussing information on home-based workers and organisations from other parts of the world

The demands of informal garment workers

Women working as informal workers in the garment industry have called for:

► Recognition and social and legal protection

Informal economy workers are not recognised under the law and therefore receive little or no legal or social protection. They are either without contracts or in no position to push for the enforcement of contracts. They call on governments to formally and legally recognise them as workers regardless of where they are positioned in the supply chain; extend social protection to all workers regardless of status; and ratify the ILO convention on home-working. They call on their employers to issue formal contracts of employment to all and enforce them.

► The right to organise

Some workers are not legally entitled to organise because they are not recognised as workers or their workplace is not recognised. Others in the informal economy

may not be covered by freedom of association legislation. Informal economy workers call on governments to recognise their right to organise and call upon employers to implement it without exceptions.

For this to happen, trade unions themselves must become more receptive to the needs of informal workers. A 2003 study of 27 trade union confederations in 22 countries found that 59% had no experience in organising informal economy workers. Either these workers were not seen as a priority or the union lacked funds or staff to organise them or did not see a benefit in doing so.¹⁵

Organising informal workers does present challenges. Informal workers (and workplaces) can be difficult to locate. Workers often have limited access to phone or faxes so communication requires (time intensive) in-person visits. One South African union reports that newly-organised informal workers need more constant attention and that organising them is more resource-intensive than formal economy workers.¹⁶ In addition, informal workers can be sceptical of unions that did not prevent the informalisation of their jobs in the first place,¹⁷ often fear talking about working conditions, including to union organisers, and may feel that they cannot afford union dues.

Generally speaking, however, informal workers call for more support from trade unions. They call on them to adopt the policy of organising and representing the most vulnerable workers, especially women; of providing training and education, especially to women; and of going to informal workers instead of expecting them to go to unions.

► Better visibility

For various reasons, including gender bias and difficulties in organising, garment workers in the informal economy are not very visible and their concerns are often unheard. Campaign groups must focus on raising their visibility as well as public awareness of their needs.

► Training and education

Lack of confidence and knowledge about legal and labour rights are regularly mentioned as obstacles to progress. Workers have little access to public infrastructure and other resources and call for helplines and legal advice to help them deal with the informal, often exploitative arrangements for information, markets, credit, training or social security that are typical of the informal economy.

Promising initiatives

Although in the past working conditions in the informal economy were not a high priority, this is changing as workers begin to organise and to grow more aware of their rights.

► Mapping projects are contributing significantly to increasing the visibility and confidence of homeworkers. These projects generally aim to get workers themselves—in Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia—to "map" home-working. This is done:

- by compiling information on where workers are and what they do, carrying out surveys and providing training and education. Mapping projects have led to new networks, both local and international and to the development of leadership skills;
- by tracing global supply chains, helping workers to understand their place within them and the implications of the structure of these chains to organising.

In some countries, mapping has been a preliminary to organising (see box page 64) and to campaigning for policy changes.¹⁸

► Self-help groups are forming, some of which bring together informal workers and trade unions. In the Philippines, Malakaya (Women Workers Aiming for Freedom) is an alliance of trade unionists and informal workers set up in 1998 to organise informal economy workers, make women workers more aware of their rights and develop leadership skills. It also facilitates informal workers' contribu-



Home-based garment workshop, Belgrade, Serbia, 2005

From China to Australia: Winnie's story

I came to Australia from China twelve years ago, and I have two children. First, I worked in a sweatshop and after I had my second child I started working from home.

At home, the boss just gives me overlocking work for part of the garment, so I don't make whole garments. Because of this I am not always busy as I have to wait for someone else to finish the rest of the garment. I only work about six hours a day. The boss gave me the machine to use, so I am not able to get other work from other contractors to increase my income. Even though the boss gave me the machine I have to pay for any repairs if it is broken.

I am very fast at sewing, but my rate of pay is still very low as the piece rate is low. I usually can get about \$6 an hour. When I first started working at home I was actually getting \$8-9 an hour because I was fast. The boss was surprised that I was so fast, so he reduced the rate he paid me for future orders of the same style.

Because my husband's income is very low it is not enough for our family to survive, so I must keep this job. Sometimes the sewing work gets busy with large, urgent orders, and then I don't have time to look after my children properly. At these times I get a lot of pain in my back and neck. There is also a lot of dust in the house from the material, so my children and I often get sick from this.

All these things make me really upset and I want to give up sewing, but I don't have any choice about getting another job. Even if I can only make \$100 to \$200 in a week that is very important income for my family.

In addition to these low rates of pay, I do not receive any superannuation, holiday pay, sick pay, overtime pay and I am not covered for workers compensation.

Fair Wear Campaign, Australia

tions to social security and health insurance schemes.¹⁹

- ▶ Trade unions representing and recruiting informal workers are on the increase. The ICFTU has set up a working group on the informal economy and invites unions to adopt new approaches to recruiting women workers. A Global Unions campaign in 2004 called "Unions for Women, Women for Unions" supported the efforts of the Moroccan Workers' Union (UMT) to reach out to informal women workers in the garment industry. Unions have begun to represent homeworkers from the garment sector, for example in Australia, Canada, Madeira, Morocco and the UK.
- ▶ There is a significant increase in NGOs conducting research on and integrating issues relating to the informal garment economy in their campaigning. In 2004, informal and precarious work was the focus of "Play Fair at the Olympics", a joint campaign by the Clean Clothes Campaign, Oxfam International and Global Unions. Networks representing the interests of homeworkers, often supported by women's groups, are working to empower informal workers all over the world. It was their sustained campaigning which led to the ILO adopting the Convention on Homeworking in 1996.

Crucially, more coordination and cooperation is taking place between unions, labour rights, women and migrant worker organisations. The 2004 seminar on the Informal Economy in the Garment Industry (organised by IRENE and the Clean Clothes Campaign, which brought together forty-five people from twenty countries) was significant in terms of networking and formulating well-informed strategies that will better support informal workers in their struggle for improved conditions.

Such cooperation, especially with organisations that explicitly look at the gendered needs of workers and at the gender dynamics which help construct the framework—legal, social and econom-

ic—in which women live and work, is central to successfully addressing the costs borne by women workers, in terms of poverty and job insecurity, in an increasingly informalised garment industry.

- ¹ ICFTU (2004a) "The informal economy: women on the frontline," *Trade Union World Briefing*, No. 2, 2004. Available at <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991219020>.
- ² In the Chinese province of Guangdong, the hub of the country's garment and footwear manufacture, 60% of women workers have no proper contract of employment and 90% have no access to social security. Oxfam International (2004) *Trading Away Our Rights - Women working in global supply chains*, p.5.
- ³ WWW (2003) *Garment Industry Subcontracting and Workers Rights, Report of Women Working Worldwide Action Research in Asia and Europe*, Manchester. See www.cleanclothes.org/campaign/homeworkmain.htm.
- ⁴ See for instance ICFTU (2004b) "Organising women in North Africa, to combat the ravages of globalization," *Uni In Depth*, March 8. Available at <http://www.union-network.org>.
- ⁵ This trend, once documented only in the EPZs, is now reportedly on the increase beyond the bounds of the zones, see Philippine Resource Center paper published as part of Women Working Worldwide research reports on subcontracting chains, September 2003.
- ⁶ ICFTU (2003) *Internationally-recognized core labour standards in Indonesia: Report for the WTO General Council Review of Trade Policies of Indonesia*, Brussels. ⁷ For example, at Lizhan Footwear Factory, Guangdong. See Kernaghan, Charles (2000) *Made in China: The Role of U.S. Companies in Denying Human and Worker Rights*, May, National Labor Committee, New York, p. 54.
- ⁸ Kernaghan, 2000: 48 and 54.
- ⁹ Ofreneo, Rosalinda Pineda, Joseph Lim and Lourdes Abad Gula (2002) "The View From Below: Impact of the Financial Crisis on Subcontracted Workers in the Philippines," p.101 of Balakrishnan, Radhika (ed) (2002) *The Hidden Assembly Line: Gender Dynamics of Subcontracted Work in a Global Economy*, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield.
- ¹⁰ See for example, CAW 2001: "Women Workers in the informal economy and organizational challenges—a perspective," published as part of materials for the Regional Workshop on Women Workers in Informal Work, 6-8 November 2001, Bangkok.
- ¹¹ Ofreneo et al, 2002: 100-101.



Permanently Temporary in Pakistan

Razia works at Venus Knitwear, in the finishing department where 15 women and five men work together. The company is in Lahore, in the province of Punjab, and exports T-shirts and jeans to the United States and Britain. In total, the factory employs 500 women aged between 14 and 30.

Razia has been working there for three years but is still temporary. She has no letter of appointment. She starts work at 7:00 a.m. and finishes at 10 or 11:00 p.m. Often she has no idea at what time she will get back home. At least she doesn't live as far away as her friend Bano, who has to leave home two hours before she is due to start work.

"We go home when the boss allows us," she said. "We work long hours without getting overtime pay. My male supervisor harasses me by passing unwelcome remarks. He tries to have affairs with young girls and threatens to stop their salary if they refuse him."

Very few of the women working at the factory are married. The few women who have children do not get maternity leave. Razia is not getting an equal wage for equal work. There is no separate toilet for women and no place to eat. Razia sits on the floor at lunchtime and eats the food she has brought from home. Workers are not allowed to talk with each other. Sometime the supervisor allows a tea break, sometimes not. She works in dim light and because of this gets headaches and eye problems. There is no proper ventilation system and most of the women suffer from asthma or lungs problems.

Razia is paid piece rate and earns RS. 1200 per month (US\$ 24). Her employer gets workers to sign a blank piece of paper in receipt of their wages. Razia says there is no union at the factory; any worker trying to form a union would be turned out of his/her job.

One of her friends was raped on her way home from work, back in 2001, together with six other women workers. Although the women were given compensation by the company, management still refused to accept them as employees. The local police did nothing about it.

From information collected by Women Working Worldwide in 2003.

NGO Efforts Yield Unions for Chilean Homeworkers

Between 2000 and 2004, AnaClara, a Chilean organisation providing training to women, was a partner of Homeworkers Worldwide in a mapping programme which led to the development of a new form of local women's trade union.²⁰ These trade unions are local and include both own-account and dependent workers.²¹ The local unions come together for national level meetings and hope to set up a national federation.

AnaClara started their work with home-based workers by focusing on specific geographical areas, mainly in the region of Santiago, the capital city, and Chile's second city, Concepcion. They found that in the clothing and footwear industry companies were contracting out much of their assembly work to small workshops and homeworkers. Some of this work was for the national market, some for export. In addition to producing own-brand shoes, the homeworkers produced Hush Puppies, which appear to have been sub-contracted to Bata.

AnaClara initially carried out surveys with homeworkers and followed this up with informal discussions and meetings in women's homes. Formal trade unions were set up at a later stage and a training programme was organised for the leaders. The training included building self-confidence, awareness about the economy and women's place in it, and sharing examples from other countries of homeworkers organising and group work techniques.

At the same time, AnaClara investigated the supply networks involved in the production and distribution of footwear and garments and contacted those who were organising workers at different points in the network, whether in the formal or informal part. This laid the basis for an alliance of different organisations to work together for better conditions for workers throughout the sector.

Jane Tate, Homeworkers Worldwide

¹² Wong, Monina, in WWW (2003) "Subcontracting in the Garment Industry: Women Working Worldwide Project Workshop," report on February 2003 meeting, Bangkok, WWW, Manchester, p. 15.

¹³ Kidder, Thalia and Kate Raworth (2004) *Good jobs' and hidden costs: women workers documenting the price of precarious employment*, Oxfam International, p.3. Available at http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/downloads/gdt_kidder_and_raworth.pdf.

¹⁴ Kidder and Raworth: 4.

¹⁵ ICFTU (2004a).

¹⁶ Bennett, Mark (2003) "Organizing in the Informal Economy: A Case Study of the Clothing Industry in South Africa," SEED Working Paper No. 37, ILO, Geneva, p. 26-27.

¹⁷ Bennett: 26.

¹⁸ In 2001 in Thailand, workers campaigned for the inclusion of informal workers' right to unionise in a new labour relations bill. See CAW (2001) "Our Voices.....Will be Heard:

Report of the Regional Workshop on Women Workers in Informal Work—Organizing, Lobbying and Advocacy," Bangkok, p. 34.

¹⁹ ICFTU (2004a).

²⁰ AnaClara has since dissolved and a new organisation has been formed to work with homeworkers called CECAM—the Centre for Education and Training of Women.

²¹ Dependent homeworkers work for an employer as opposed to own-account homeworkers, who work for themselves.



Jane Tate

International coordinator, Homeworkers Worldwide

Homeworkers Worldwide (HWW) is a UK-based organisation that aims to support women home-based workers around the world. We run programmes and projects, publish newsletters and other materials and organise visits, exchanges and meetings. As an organisation based in the North, we also take part in advocacy and lobbying work with organisations based in the UK or other parts of Europe.

I started working with homeworkers, or outworkers as some call them, in West Yorkshire (UK) in the late eighties. I was employed by the West Yorkshire Low Pay Unit, a small organisation concerned with working conditions in the area. My work was to reach out to workers outside trade unions, usually in small and scattered workplaces, to inform them of their employment rights. We discovered thousands of women working at home for cash in the area—some in textiles or sewing garments, but many also in printing, engineering, electronics, typing or addressing envelopes.

Most earned very low wages and often had irregular work, with no rights to sick pay, holiday pay or severance pay. This at a time when flexible work was being promoted as the pattern for the future. Well, homeworkers made up the most flexible workforce of all: when

“There have been many inspiring women who have been part of this movement...but most important are the women homeworkers who have come forward, to give a lead to others”

there was work, they had work; when there was no work, there was nothing and no income.

We discovered that homework was increasing, not only in West Yorkshire but also throughout Europe. From 1990 to 1994, we (women in small organisations, often based in local communities and often with trade union support) developed contacts with others doing research or trying to organise homeworkers in Western Europe. In some countries, like Greece and Spain, we linked with feminist academics working on women's labour rights and writing about homeworking. Later, women trade unionists working on the issue in the Netherlands, Italy, Greece and Portugal also became involved. The best example of organising was Portugal where, on the island of Madeira, the Union of Embroiderers (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores da Industria Bordados, Tapeçarias, Texteis e Artes) had over twenty years won recognition and rights for the women who did the delicate hand embroidery for which the island is famous.

We also got to know women in Italy, Greece, Spain and the Netherlands. All confirmed that homework was on the increase. We visited Toronto, in Canada, where a clothing union was beginning to organise the hundreds of women, mostly Chinese or Vietnamese, working from home in the city. We made contact with organisations in Asia, particularly India and South East Asia, where new attempts were being made to gain recognition for homeworkers.

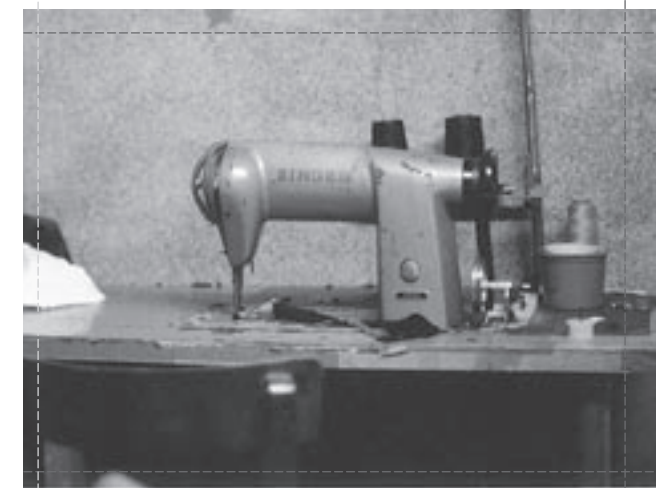
In different parts of the world, the manufacturing industry was decentralising production and de-

manding flexible supply lines, especially the fashion industry. Increasing global competition led to more and more subcontracting to different parts of the world, often leading to homeworkers at the end of the chain.

At the same time, more and more women in the rural areas of Europe and Asia were turning to handicrafts as a way of supporting their families. These women had no employer or agent marketing their products but had to design, product and market by themselves.

Although some women were working for others and some for themselves, they had much in common. They worked in their houses for a low and irregular income, without any of the benefits enjoyed by other workers. They were rarely organised or had any recognition by industry or government.

Continued on page 68





profile Jane Tate, continued from p. 67

The international network was set up as a result of the growing number of contacts between organisations in Asia, Europe, North America and South Africa. The aim was to support those trying to organise homeworkers. In 1995-96, we focused on winning recognition for homeworkers at the ILO, through the adoption of a Convention on Home Work. Although since the adoption of this Convention in 1996 we have campaigned for its ratification at national government level, we have changed our focus back to organising homeworkers, particularly in countries where little had been done before.

From 2000 to 2004, HWW implemented a programme of action-research as a way of encouraging the development of new organisations, focusing on specific areas of South Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America as well as more limited work in China and Africa. Following this programme, new regional centres are being established to strengthen the networks and grassroots organisations.

The aim everywhere is to help set up organisations through which homeworkers can work together to improve their working and living conditions. In many ways, these organisations are like trade unions, although the legal form they take varies from country to country. But they are also a new kind of organisation since the workers involved are almost entirely women, many of them facing multiple discrimination not only as women, but as members of indigenous, minority or tribal communities, on grounds of caste as well as class.

The solidarity established through the international movement has inspired much of the work. Although the immediate issues are always local, there are many global connections,

from chains of production and marketing, patterns of migration or common patterns in the lives of women. We aim to give support to this movement, to enable women homeworkers from cities and villages in different countries to learn from each other, organise together and become leaders in bringing about change in the lives of their families and communities.

I have been privileged to visit many home-based workers and learn about their struggles to earn a

livelihood and build an organisation. There have been many inspiring women who have been part of this movement, including professional and academic women. But most important are the women homeworkers who have come forward, to give a lead to others, deal with the practical day-to-day issues as well as travel beyond their own town or village. Some are illiterate and uneducated but they have a wisdom born of a life of struggle. It is they who will be the backbone of the growing international movement.





Majda Sikosek

Serbia-Montenegro and CEE region coordinator for HomeWorkers Worldwide, coordinator, FELICITAS

On behalf of HomeWorkers Worldwide (HWW), I am responsible for establishing local and regional informal and formal networks of homeworkers and their organisations. As coordinator of FELICITAS, I am responsible for building the capacities of the organisation so it can deal with the problems of home-based and informal workers as well as the unemployed.

In Serbia, I am also involved in activities connected with the work of the CCC. Presently, I am preparing an exhibition on labour rights and working conditions in the garment industry in Serbia.

The 1990s were very hard in Serbia. As a mother of three sons, I had to find a way to feed my family, which is how I started home-based work. I have firsthand experience of all the problems that homeworkers are facing. As a member of the Association of Business Women of Belgrade, a women's NGO, I participated in 2001 in a workshop organised by the CCC in Istanbul, where we talked among other things about home-based work. The representative of HomeWorkers Worldwide made a presentation in which I basically recognised

“Once you raise someone’s hopes, you have to do your best not to disappoint them”

myself. That’s how I discovered that I was a home-based worker and got the idea of starting to work on the issue of homeworking and informal work.

Since then I have made contact with hundreds of women in Serbia, talking about their problems (work, personal and family), their wishes, dreams and ideas. Those are the things that inspire me and push me to work, especially the expectations of those women. In the office we have so many letters hanging on the wall, from women thanking us for giving them new hope and “letting the light into the tunnel”. Once you raise someone’s hopes, you have to do your best not to disappoint them.

The place of women in our society has changed a lot during the last two decades. The 1980s seem like a period of liberation and freedom, but that was on the surface. The changes started slowly, with the re-patriarchalisation of society. During the wars and dictatorship of the 1990s especially, women were pushed back into the home and kept there. Women workers were the first to lose their jobs, but were “not allowed” to be depressed about that. It was OK for men to be depressed and to have all kinds of excuses not to do anything to feed their families, but women had to do something to save the family. Men were ashamed to take jobs that were beneath them, or jobs that were not paid well. Women accepted whatever they could find, which is how they found themselves in the majority in the informal sector, working for “nothing” in very poor conditions. When you see all of that, when you are a part of all that, you have to get involved!

I would like to accomplish a lot, but I am also trying to be realistic (Utopia after all is just a book!). Most of all I would like to help women to value themselves, to become aware of their rights. I would like to strengthen them to fight for their rights, to show

them that there is no way forward except to organise and take their future into their own hands.

What I do is raise awareness about human rights and within those, workers’ rights. It’s not easy.

There are lots of brave and active women around. I cannot single one out as my inspiration. It is all these women’s energy, courage and strength that inspire me in my work and push me to my limits.



Siobhan Wall

Artist

When I first arrived in Amsterdam from the UK a few years ago I wanted to meet Dutch people and do some work with non-profit making organisations. I answered an advertisement asking for volunteers at the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) and initially, I spent many hours sorting out the CCC video collection and photo archives. I was shocked by what I saw in the videos and wanted to use visual art to raise awareness of what it's like to be a garment worker in places like Sri Lanka, Bulgaria, Mexico or Thailand.

Sewing is in my background. My grandmother sewed eiderdowns in a factory in the North of England and my mother made and designed my own clothes, which were often quite unusual. As a young woman, I was influenced by socialist teachers in the very progressive comprehensive school I attended. In the 1980s I belonged to a women's art group in Oxford while studying for a second degree in fine art and critical studies. I would say that feminist writing has greatly influenced my art practice. I also read a lot of post-structural theory, which has informed most of my current thinking about how we recognise and respond to people we identify as different to ourselves.

“I try to challenge some of the complacency that limits how we perceive people in circumstances different to our own”

My main project for the CCC was *The Clothes She Wears*, an art installation which is also meant to help people imagine the lives of women garment workers.¹

In the exhibition, viewers can see and touch the clothes worn by actual garment workers. Even an initial glance at the women's outfits will reveal that most of them are cheaply made and worn out.

This is not just an art exhibition. Information about each of the women who sent their clothes hangs next to each of the exhibits. This tells viewers about one woman losing her job, for example, and another being in poor health because of having to use dangerous chemicals. Most of the women speak about never having enough money to provide for the family's needs despite working long hours.

The workers participating in the project were given money to replace the clothes they had sent us. It was particularly shocking that the Chinese woman from Australia hadn't bought any new clothes for ten years. Her shoes and thin trousers are really worn out and torn.

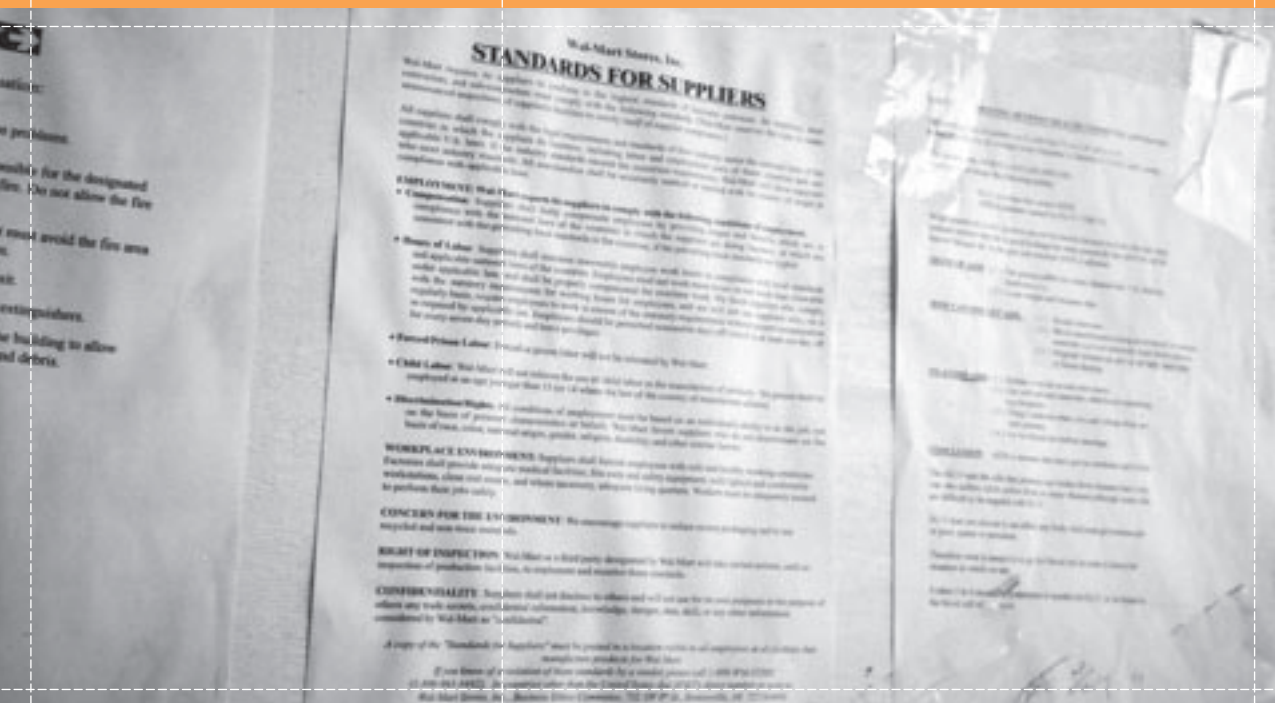
This exhibition clearly demonstrates that these women have very few choices about where they live, what work they do or what they can afford to buy. Though I had never spoken to them, I felt I'd got to know the women who had worn these clothes and they were no longer anonymous to me.

In my art practice, I try to encourage the viewer to be self-aware and consider the connectedness between our lives and the lives of people in very different circumstances. Images play a very important role in influencing our attitudes, in particular

towards the “other”. I try to challenge some of the complacency that limits how we perceive people in circumstances different to our own.

Art works on an unconscious level so you can bypass certain assumptions and reach people who may be impervious to argument and rational debate. Art can “touch” the viewer and this helps to break down distinctions that lead us to think of other people's lives as separate or removed from our own. It can create the conditions for a unique kind of intimacy that draws the viewer in and hopefully encourages an empathetic response. The visitors' book for *The Clothes She Wears* is full of comments from people who were moved by what they saw in the exhibition. I was delighted that the clothes could travel to different venues because this meant that these unique garments could be seen by many different people. This project offered a valuable opportunity to learn about the hidden lives of women workers.

¹ View the exhibition catalogue at http://www.schoneklaren.nl/ftp/clothes_she_wears.pdf.



Codes of Conduct through a Gender Lens

Angela Hale and Jane Turner

In this article, Angela Hale and Jane Turner argue that codes of conduct—whether model codes or codes developed by companies—suffer from gender blindness, and that this prevents them from being a more effective tool for the defence of women workers' rights.

Company codes of conduct in the garment and sports shoe industries have been adopted mainly in response to public exposure of the plight of workers, to address supply chain issues which existing regulations fail to address. Yet these codes have been drawn up not in the light of the specific problems faced by mostly women workers but rather with reference to existing regulation¹ based on the experiences of a predominantly male full-time workforce. This does not mean that codes are irrelevant to women workers but that they do need to be looked at through a gender lens. This implies looking at what specific clauses mean for women and identifying what issues they do not cover that are of importance to women.

It also implies looking at how codes can be implemented and monitored in the places where most

women work. Garment supply chains are highly gendered: not only are the majority of workers women, but the further down the supply chain we look, the more female the workforce becomes. A key question therefore is what impact can codes of conduct have on the vast majority of women garment workers, including those employed on a casual basis in small unregulated workplaces?

Labour rights activists must not lose sight of the fact that unless codes can be implemented at the end of supply chains as well as in first tier production units, they will fail to be of use to the majority of women garment workers. Indeed, codes could even contribute to creating a two-tier system, where one set of standards exists for workers within their reach and another, far worse reality is the norm for those beyond it.



ELENA MALLED/OXFAM

Garment workers, Tangier, Morocco, 2005

Why we need a gender perspective

In order to respond to the needs of workers in the garment industry, it is important to recognise that the way in which most women engage in paid work is different from men. For example:

- ▷ Whether or not they are in paid work, women assume most responsibility for domestic work, including care of the young and elderly.
- ▷ Women's responsibility for domestic life means that they are typically under more rather than less pressure to earn a living wage.
- ▷ Most of the paid work that women do is outside the formal economy. They are concentrated in small unprotected workplaces, largely overlooked by official trade unions.
- ▷ Most women who are employed in large, more regulated workplaces are young unmarried women.
- ▷ Women's work is seen as worth less than men's. Women are paid less simply because they are women. They are also rarely seen as appropriate candidates for training and promotion.
- ▷ Women are viewed as a flexible workforce, employed when needed and more easily dismissed when demand is low.

What is a Code of Conduct?

A code of conduct (sometimes referred to as code of labour practices, charter or guidelines) is a document outlining the basic rights and minimum standards a corporation pledges to respect—or is asked to respect—in its relations with workers, communities and the environment, throughout its supply chain and for all workers regardless of status.

Model codes of conduct, setting standards to which companies should adhere, have been developed, usually by NGOs and trade unions (e.g the CCC and ICFTU model codes).

Company codes vary in content. Many still exclude the right to organise and to a living wage, make no reference to ILO standards, lack any clear system of implementation, monitoring or verification and are used more for PR purposes than as an instrument to enforce labour standards.

The CCC calls on companies to adopt the CCC model code, develop good implementation and monitoring systems and agree to independent verification of code compliance.

To read the CCC model code, see <http://www.cleanclothes.org/codes/ccccode.htm>

By employing a majority of women workers, garment manufacturers are taking advantage of these gender differences. Women suit the needs of the garment industry for the following reasons:

- ▷ Flexibilisation means that the demand is not for full time workers on proper contracts but for workers who can be used according to changing and irregular market demands.
- ▷ Increased subcontracting in the garment industry means that greater use is made of workers in small unregulated workshops where women predominate.
- ▷ The low status of women, lack of training and family commitments are seen as likely to provide a more docile and compliant workforce, particularly in the presence of male supervisors and managers.

Given these differences, it is important to ask how codes address the following issues:

- ▷ the insecure nature of much of women's work
- ▷ increased outsourcing to small, unregulated workplaces and homeworkers
- ▷ irregular and unpredictable hours which interfere with women's domestic responsibilities
- ▷ gender differences in pay, training and promotion
- ▷ the abuse of gender differences in power, e.g. sexual harassment.

Gender dimensions to clauses within codes

There are numerous different company codes as well as model codes developed by NGOs, trade unions and multi-stakeholder initiatives. Among the best are the codes of the ICFTU, the CCC and multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Ethical Trading Initiative, the Worker Rights Consortium and the Fair Wear Foundation.² Although there are differences in detail, the fundamental rights embodied in the clauses of these codes are the same and are based on ILO conventions.

But are the standards outlined in the model codes good enough? Let us look at each clause of the code of the ETI and consider the gender-specific

aspects that need to be addressed.³ It is open to debate whether a gender dimension should be incorporated within the basic codes themselves or whether additional guidance should be provided on how to interpret and implement each clause in a gender-sensitive way. Either way, there should be some scope for detailing and defining the rights and needs of women workers explicitly. If this does not happen, women's concerns tend to be hidden and are either addressed in an ad hoc fashion or ignored altogether.

1. Employment is freely chosen

This clause is interpreted as referring to prison or bonded labour. However, a more widespread example of forced labour in the garment industry is compulsory overtime. This can present women with a number of specific burdens because of their domestic responsibilities, particularly in the case of women with children. The inclusion of compulsory overtime within this clause would increase the likelihood of the issue being addressed.

2. Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected

Although these are fundamental rights for all workers, less than 5% of the garment industry is unionised and where unions are present they often fail to address the needs of women. Many women are in free trade, special economic or export processing zones (FTZs, SEZs or EPZs), where trade unionism is either banned or suppressed, or work in small workshops or at home, beyond the reach of traditional trade union organising. However, women workers have found other ways of organising, which sometimes lead on to union recognition. It is important therefore to remember that this clause is applicable beyond a narrow trade union definition, regardless of the form of organisation chosen by women workers.

3. Working conditions are safe and hygienic

Women face particular issues in terms of health and safety which need to be referred to specifically. Codes need to ensure that

employers provide safe working conditions for women with respect to menstruation and pregnancy. During pregnancy, women should be particularly protected from toxic substances and given lighter tasks without losing pay or being demoted. Women working at home or in small workshops should receive information about health risks not only for themselves but also their families.

4. Child labour shall not be used

Children tend to be referred to in a gender neutral way, but girls face a different situation from boys, reflecting the gender divisions of labour of adulthood. Gender sensitivity will ensure that child labour clauses are implemented more successfully:

- ▶ the fact that girls are more likely than boys to have household responsibilities on top of their working hours should be borne in mind;
- ▶ the role played by gender in the remediation possibilities open to girl and boy workers also need to be considered. Access to education for instance will differ in many contexts for girls and boys. If girls lose their garment industry jobs, they may be more likely to be pushed into prostitution for instance than boy workers;
- ▶ sensitivity to gender differences will help address a number of specific situations—for instance the fact that girl children, seen as more vulnerable than boys if left at home alone, will sometimes be taken to the workplace by their mother.

5. Living wages are paid

By definition, a living wage is about earning enough to take care of oneself and one's family. Yet in spite of working long hours of overtime, female garment workers are often unable to even feed themselves properly with the result that there is evidence of widespread malnutrition. This is the case with both factory workers and home-workers, the latter commonly receiving less than the legal minimum wage.

Because a higher percentage of women workers support their families than men, it is all the more important that the provision of living wages be acted upon. This is one of the points on which company codes usually fall short—requiring only that workers be paid the legal minimum wage, which is almost everywhere insufficient to meet the needs of a worker and her/his family. Companies that are members of multi-stakeholder initiatives and have therefore committed to living wages in practice mostly continue to monitor compliance against the supplier country's legal minimum wage standard.⁴

6. Working hours are not excessive

Women workers frequently cite working hours as an issue of specific concern. This is particularly the case for women who have caring responsibilities. When working hours are very long, women may not see their children for weeks on end. Older girl siblings may be given the task of looking after younger children which usually results in their non-attendance at school. Women also refer to long working hours as a threat to their personal safety as many feel at risk returning home late at night on their own from a factory or workplace.⁵ Arriving home late has also been known to result in domestic violence. These wider social costs should not be separated from workplace issues. Although model codes do specify a maximum number of hours for both the basic week (48 hours) and overtime (a maximum of twelve hours per week),

these provisions remain all too often unimplemented.

7. Non-discrimination is practiced

Codes generally state that there can be no discrimination in hiring, compensation, access to training, promotion, termination or retirement based on race, caste, national origin, religion, age, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, union membership or political affiliation. Not included is discrimination based on HIV status and reproductive rights, or discrimination experienced by women and men caring for children.

Gender discrimination is deeply embedded in employment relationships and because women are present in every other discriminated group they can face discrimination due to multiple identities. It is important that a realistic approach is taken to address this situation. This can involve a step-by-step approach, specifying what forms of discrimination, such as gender gaps in pay and promotion, need to be addressed. This needs to be done with care if measures to end discrimination are not to lead to women losing out as a result. In India, a move to make it obligatory for factories employing more than a certain number of women workers to provide crèche facilities backfired as in some cases this resulted in women not being recruited. This illustrates why it is necessary, in order for anti-discriminatory regulations to be successfully implemented, that all actors—government and civil society included—play their part and maintain pressure over time.

8. Regular employment is provided

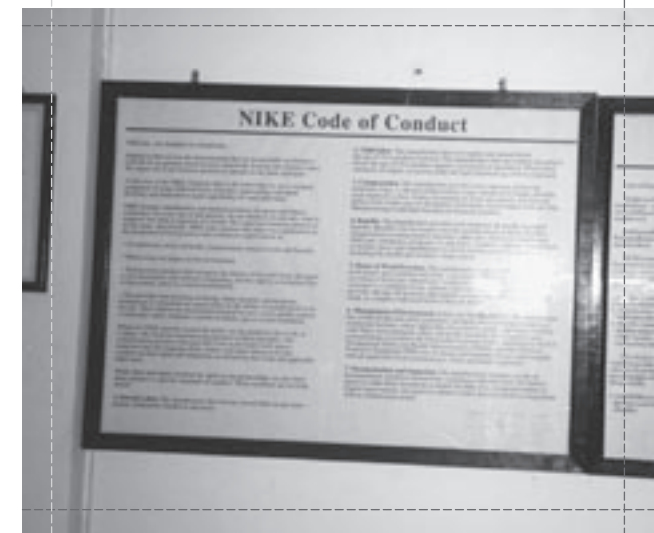
The right to legally-recognised employment status is arguably the most important clause for women workers in any code. Whether they are casual workers in factories or homeworkers, women recognise that unless they have an employment contract, they cannot use codes of conduct or any other forms of regulation as a way of accessing their rights. More attention therefore needs to be paid to the implementa-

tion of this clause. During an ETI Southern Consultation of NGOs in 2003,⁶ participants suggested that it should be legally binding for employers throughout the supply chain to have contracts with all their workers.

9. No harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed

Since women are concentrated at the bottom end of hierarchies, they are more likely to suffer from the abusive behaviour of supervisors and managers. This includes sexual harassment, which may be referred to under this clause. In order to eliminate sexual and other forms of abuse, codes provide guidance on the measures needed to create safe workplace environments for women workers. Such measures could include:

- increasing the number of women in management and supervisory roles;
- providing training for women workers to enable them to be promoted;
- taking sexual harassment seriously by acting upon it promptly and efficiently;
- adopting and implementing an effective company policy on sexual harassment, including training at all levels of the company; and
- identifying women in senior positions and legal professionals who can be approached confidentially by women workers experiencing sexual harassment.



Do codes need additional clauses?

Although it is possible that most issues important to women are implicitly included within existing provisions of codes, they are more hidden than they would be if they were clearly identified as separate areas that need to be addressed. For instance:

The right to parenthood

A separate clause stipulating the right to parenthood could highlight issues to do with reproductive rights and child care. The violation of women's reproductive rights are commonplace in the garment industry. They include being fired due to pregnancy, forced pregnancy testing, and failure to provide paid maternity leave. Similarly, long hours and lack of childcare facilities mean that women are denied the opportunity to care adequately for their children. These are amongst the most crucial issues for women and therefore need addressing within their own right.

The right to personal safety

This could cover not only the issue of sexual and physical abuse but also the lack of access to safe transport for women following overtime. Provision needs to be made for women working overtime to ensure their safe return home. It could be stipulated that overtime should finish in time for women workers to have access to safe transport and that it should be provided at an affordable rate.

Principles of code implementation

Gender sensitivity is essential in all aspects of code implementation. This includes monitoring and auditing, complaints procedures and programmes of remedial action.

Internal monitoring systems and auditing, whether by a commercial company or non-profit making organisations, are increasingly used to assess the progress of code implementation. In most cases the procedures adopted fail to pick up on gender-specific issues. The adoption of the following measures could improve identification of problems that affect women workers:

- ▶ auditors, buyers, and factory-based managers should receive gender awareness training and specific guidelines on how to interpret clauses such as the discrimination clause;
- ▶ female auditors should be included in every audit team and should be those who speak with women workers;
- ▶ participatory methodologies, particularly women-only focus groups, should be used to help uncover violations that are of priority to women workers;
- ▶ off-site interviews should be used to reduce the risk of retribution and provide a safe space where women workers do not fear speaking about sensitive issues;
- ▶ auditing companies should make contact with local trade unions and women's organisations prior to the audit to discuss endemic issues such as discrimination;
- ▶ complaint mechanisms should be accessible to workers to voice their grievances at any time—not just when auditors are in town—which would allow for worker participation in monitoring and verification systems;
- ▶ local independent monitoring groups and civil society organisations which have a

gender sensitive approach can be employed to design and/or participate in audits and in the follow-up of remedial plans;

- ▶ consultation can also take place with local women's organisations, trade unions and legal professionals, to assess whether pregnant women are being dismissed because they are pregnant, whether women are paid maternity and other social benefits they are entitled to, etc.; and
- ▶ gender desegregation of the information generated by an audit can be used to detect gender-related discrimination. For example: looking at the percentage of men and women at supervisor level, at whether women are provided with training to become supervisors, at how women's employment status compares to men's, at whether women workers are predominantly the ones on temporary contracts, at whether there is occupational segregation, at whether women earn less than men for the same work.

In addition, workers should receive information and training on codes, implementation procedures and associated issues; women workers should be involved in remedial actions following monitoring and auditing reports, particularly in relation to highly sensitive issues; specific training should be provided to enable more female supervisors and managers to be in a position to monitor compliance on a regular basis.

The purchasing practices of companies (for instance on prices paid to suppliers or the time allowed for delivery) are commonly at odds with the requirements set by companies' own codes. For instance, the fact that prices paid to factories have been steadily declining over the past eight to ten years plays a part in suppliers resorting to sub-contracting in order to keep costs down, which itself has an impact on the wages earned by workers: workers in sub-contracted facilities earn consistently less than in the first tier of supplier factories. Similarly, retailers' insistence on "just in time" delivery plays a part in suppliers' demand for a "flexible" workforce and excessive overtime, which is at odds with retailers' efforts

to keep the number of hours worked to a reasonable level. Purchasing practises do therefore need examining through a gender lens. Failing that, it will be difficult for companies to deliver on the commitments made in their codes of conduct.

A code drawn up by women workers for women workers

Most codes have been drawn up without any negotiation with workers, let alone with women workers at the far end of supply chains. They have been developed in a top-down fashion by companies themselves, or by employers' institutions, buying agents or multi-stakeholder initiatives.

However, there are a few cases of codes which have been drawn up by workers themselves, notably the Nicaraguan Ethical Code, drawn up by the Maria Elena Cuadra Women's Movement (MEC), a women's organisation working with thousands of garment workers in the *maquilas*. Through consulting directly with women workers, MEC developed a code which, though based on existing legislation and therefore not that different from other model codes of conduct, nevertheless reflects the priorities of women workers in the garment-for-export sector in Nicaragua. The Ethical





Code became a Ministerial Decree in February 1998 and was subsequently signed by all employers in the Free Trade Zone in Managua.⁷

This code, as others developed by trade unions, workers' organisations and NGOs, includes the ILO Core Labour standards (Freedom of Association, Child Labour, Non discrimination, and Forced Labour). It also includes reproductive rights (articles 1 and 2) and health and safety at work (article 4), both of which are frequently violated in the Nicaraguan free trade zones, physical and mental abuse (article 3), social benefits (article 5), payment of wages and benefits (articles 5 and 6) and working hours. What is particularly striking about the code is the way in which reproductive needs are highlighted, for example in the frequent reference to the needs of pregnant women, and the importance attached to treating workers with respect.

The main outcome of the code has been to empower women workers—through the provision of training and awareness raising, and building the credibility of the organisation within free trade zones and nationally.

The code is treated as a tool for workers to claim their rights. Many of MEC's 30,000 members and 8,000 labour rights promoters⁸ carry handbook-sized copies of the code with them to work everyday and are ready to challenge code violations. They have the confidence to do this through being aware of their rights, knowing that they can access legal support from the MEC legal team and that they are members of an organisation that has national recognition for defending garment workers' rights.

An important indicator of the level of confidence and empowerment of women workers can be seen in the increasing reporting of labour rights violations. A total 2,353 cases were dealt with by MEC's legal team in 2002 and around 40,000 workers now have handbooks on national labour legislation and Nicaragua's Ethical Code.⁹ A legal representative of the Chih Hsing Corporation, one of the largest factories in Las Mercedes free trade zone, reports: "This has had a major impact on the workers. Whenever they are faced with the need to demand their rights, they all take the handbooks out of their pockets and read aloud the article that defends their action. They always carry the handbook with them and use it as a guide."¹⁰

Negotiating skills, the knowledge of local legislation and the political space created by MEC enable workers to resolve issues directly with employers which is much faster and more efficient than waiting months for cases to go to court. The head of human resources in export processing zone company Mil Colores agrees that "MEC's main strength is its network of thoroughly trained promoters, who have shown that they are able to negotiate using legal arguments and suggest how problems can be solved through dialogue."¹¹

The PR department of the Free Trade Zone Corporation has acknowledged that companies are now more open to MEC promoters operating in their factories because management can see that these mediators try to solve problems internally where possible.

As with all codes of conduct, implementation is no easy matter. Yet MEC's approach to code development demonstrates what can be achieved through taking women workers as the starting point and highlights the importance which ownership of the code by workers has in terms of empowerment and implementation. This does not of course take away the responsibilities of brands and retailers; equally, the role of multi-stakeholder initiatives and campaigners in pressuring brands remains important. But MEC shows that beyond the content of codes, it is organising women workers and providing them with education about their rights which matters.

⁶ Report on the ETI Biennial Conference 2003, "Key Challenges in Ethical Trade", available at <http://www.ethicaltrade.org/Z/lib/2003/12/eticonf/index.shtml>.
⁷ To read the code, please see <http://www.mec.org.ni>.
⁸ Labour rights promoters are trained workers who advise their co-workers of their rights and support them when reporting a violation to the FTZ Corporation or the employer. They will refer them to the MEC team of lawyers if necessary. They have all been trained in negotiation techniques and conflict resolution. Most are quite open about their MEC membership in the factories (there are a few exceptions where this is not safe). Organisers bring new workers to MEC for labour rights training. Some have been trained in research methodology and have participated in the numerous worker consultations MEC has carried out. Several have represented MEC abroad. MEC does have one or two male promoters and allows male partners to come to the training sessions. However, it is still very much a women's organisation.
⁹ From e-mail correspondence with Central America Women's Network, June 1, 2005.
¹⁰ From report to funder by Central America Women's Network, 2003.
¹¹ From an external, independent project evaluation conducted by Central America Women's network in 2003.

¹ In particular ILO core conventions.
² A common code of conduct is being drafted by multi-stakeholder initiatives which can be seen at www.jo-in.org.
³ Both authors worked for NGOs (WWW and CAWN) that are members of the Ethical Trading Initiative.
⁴ With the exception of the Fair Wear Foundation, which, where collective bargaining agreements are not in place, calls for wage increases set in consultation with competent and relevant local authorities, unions, business associations and NGOs.
⁵ Kidder and Raworth (Gender and Development, 2004) argue that women having to pay to take safe transport home after working overtime is a hidden cost, as is having to re-arrange child care.

Investigating Women's Workplace Realities

Lynda Yanz, of the Maquila Solidarity Network, speaks with Maritza Paredes coordinator of the Independent Monitoring Team of Honduras (EMIH)

Q: How can code implementation better empower women?

A: Codes can or should give workers a tool to respond immediately in the face of a problem in the factory. These should provide democratic and structured processes for raising problems. Of course this will be more easily accomplished in situations where workers are organised in some way.

Q: Do codes serve the interests of women?

A: Yes, to the extent that they include elements like discrimination (on the basis of gender, age, etc.) they do. And also when they make a clear connection to national legislation, since many of our countries have legislation particularly related to women.

In Honduras, for example there is the “Law of Equality of Opportunities.” When our team carries out monitoring we always include a verification in relationship to this law, which then brings in issues of education, maternity and child care, which is much more specific than any code language.

For us, the link to national law and international conventions is critical. Even on the issue of salary. Our constitution says that workers have a right to a “dignified salary,” which goes far beyond most codes’ language. Unfortunately, implementation usually falls short.

Q: What difference to code implementation does organising make?

A: Workers who are organised—into unions, women’s or community groups—can make much more effective use of codes. Obviously when workers are organised this changes the way that monitoring teams relate to the workforce; this provides for a much more structured and representative relationship. In fact, those who are organised can or should be able to take better advantage of codes and monitoring processes. For the monitors it changes the way we think about the workforce because it means we need to establish vehicles for relating formally to the organisations involved.

Q: How did you get involved in the world of codes and monitoring?

A: Here in Honduras in about ‘93 or ‘94, there was a lot of conflict in the *maquilas*. It became international with the Kathie Lee Gifford exposé on national television by the US-based National Labor Committee. That’s when we started to talk about codes of conduct. At the same time, we started to learn about experiences in other parts of the world—but certainly weren’t sure where it was all heading. There was

a lot of discussion about codes—positive and also very negative. I was working with the Committee of Human Rights (CODEH). We had always seen ourselves as monitors of what happens in the *maquilas*—but monitors from the outside. Then we heard about the GMIES experience (Grupo Monitoreo de El Salvador, a monitoring and verification initiative set up by civil society organisations in El Salvador in 1996), where they had begun to monitor—but from the inside, for a brand, but retaining their independence through public reporting.

We began to be involved in discussions in Honduras, regionally and internationally where people were looking for a new way of achieving more respect for the labour rights of workers. It seemed that something was being achieved through this kind of engagement—or at least there was resolution on some issues. The possibilities seemed important to us, a way of finding new ways of making some gains when for so long it seemed we weren’t getting anywhere. We never saw either codes or monitoring as “The Solution” but rather something that could complement other forms of struggle, a tool.

Q: And EMIH?

A: EMIH came together in 1997 as a coalition of four organisations from different sectors—women, church, and then labour and human rights—which came together to deal with a specific conflict. After that experience, which had both positive and negative results, two of the organisations continued working together—to reflect on that first experience, to understand better what was happening with other groups and to begin to prepare ourselves to be monitors. That’s where Gap entered the picture. It took over a year of discussion for that first memorandum of agreement to be signed—in 2001.¹

Between 1997 and 2001 EMIH was in what I’d call a kind of hibernation—while we tried to figure out what the appropriate approach to independent monitoring was for Honduras.



We’re now in 2005 and have a strong team of five incredible women.

EMIH views codes of conduct and monitoring as a tool—a tool that can be used to ensure compliance with national labour law and constitutional agreements, international law, and then of course codes of conduct. In addition to third-party monitoring, EMIH carries out research, monitors what’s happening in the *maquila* sector, provides training related to labour rights and codes, and is also involved in lobbying of different kinds.

We have a strong link with a coalition of women’s groups called the Women’s Forum for Life (*El Foro Mujer por la Vida*). We work on a range of issues related to economics, violence and culture. Recently we’ve also started looking into issues related to homework and also the agricultural sector.

There’s a tremendous amount to be done to secure labour rights for women workers. EMIH is one piece of the mosaic attempting to contribute to change.

¹ In 2001, negotiations started with US garment retailer Gap about monitoring some of their supply factories in Honduras. Gap was already working with independent monitoring groups in El Salvador (GMIES) and Guatemala (COVERCO).



Lynda Yanz

Coordinator, Maquila Solidarity Network

I left school when I was 19 and started my working life as a secretary in a small house construction firm. I naively thought I could replace my rather incompetent boss when he left, but had a rather rude awakening when he was replaced by a very well-meaning but even more incompetent manager. In the heat of that battle, I saw a notice in the newspaper about a conference on women and work. I didn't even know it was International Women's Year—1974.

That conference changed my life. It was the first time I'd seen women speaking out, met women who'd gone to university, who were active in politics, you name it. Until then I hadn't even heard of "the women's movement," "feminism," or "the left." At the end of the conference, when the organisers asked for volunteers I signed up for every committee on the list.

Right from the beginning, I was mostly involved in labour issues, supporting efforts of women to organise and pushing for equal pay, and generally supporting the women's rights campaigns of the '70s, which seem so long ago now. I also became connected to Central America liberation struggles, first through a woman who has become a dear and inspiring friend

"We need to find ways to be more effective, more thoughtful, more collaborative..."

over many years. I first met Margaret Randall when I organised the Winnipeg leg of her national book tour to promote *Women in the Cuban Revolution*, published by the Women's Press, an amazing feminist publishing collective based in Toronto. Many years later, I edited her collection of testimonies of young women leaders in the Nicaraguan revolution, *Sandino's Daughters*.

For the last 11 years, I've been the coordinator of the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN). MSN is about taking advantage of "spaces"—engaging with companies, whenever engagement is strategic, campaigning when that seems most useful, but always trying to support the efforts of Southern partners to increase the space for workers' empowerment and improve wages and working conditions.

My first exposure to struggles of *maquila* workers was as part of a very small tri-national women's collective based in Mexico called Woman to Woman (MAM). In and around 1992, MAM, along with two other Mexican women's groups, was instrumental in setting up a network of women's labour rights groups mostly along the Mexico-US border to build a stronger feminist vision of work in the *maquila* sector and to provide support to and training for women *maquila* workers.

The idea of MSN grew out of that work. It was 1994, the free trade agreement between Mexico, US and Canada was being negotiated, and although the Canadian anti-free trade movement was united in opposing NAFTA, based on Canada's negative experience with the US-Canada agreement, some of us were concerned that the anti-NAFTA position included some elements of a protectionist standpoint, i.e. "Mexican *maquila* workers are robbing us of our jobs."

MSN was established to make sure that the voices, visions and struggles of Mexican *maquila* workers were present in the NAFTA debate. It was the amalgamation and joint vision of two networks and two people. MAM, through me, and SolidarityWorks, a network of trade union activists, through Bob Jeffcott. The MSN mandate at that point was straightforward old-style solidarity: support the struggles of Mexican *maquila* workers and educate Canadian workers, unions and civil society groups about the importance of working in solidarity with Mexican movements and workers.

With the end of the Central American "civil wars," *maquila* investment was beginning to arrive in Central America. Given both Bob's and my historic connections with liberation struggles in that region, it was a natural fit to extend our network links beyond Mexico to Central America. Very early on we connected, for example, with Sandra Ramos who in 1994 left the union movement because it was unable or unwilling to deal with women workers in the growing *maquila* sector. She founded a women workers' movement of working and unemployed women, which has become one of the strongest in the region. We also began to link with other groups and leaders who were beginning to address the problems and opportunities created by the arrival of *maquilas* and brands in Central America, especially the independent monitoring groups in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua but also women's groups and unions.

Our involvement in the Gap campaign in 1995 concerning worker rights violations at the Mandarin International factory, a Gap supplier in El Salvador, opened up new possibilities for leveraging codes of conduct to pressure brands to "accept responsibility"



Maria Luisa Regalado

Coordinator, CODEMUH

I always wanted to be involved in my community in the province of Ocotepeque in Honduras. My father was violent. He also forbade me from participating in the local church. At the age of seven, I was doing housework instead of attending school. In defiance of my father, I would sneak away to participate in church activities. At eighteen, following the death of both parents, I had to support the younger sisters and younger brother left in my care.

I did domestic work (looking after my younger sisters and brother but also cooking and doing washing for my elder brother) and stayed involved with the church. It provided me with an opportunity to receive literacy classes through a radio program. I continued my studies and eventually finished primary school and part of high school.

I started working with rural women in 1981 and was one of the first activists in Honduras to work on gender issues. In response to urbanization and the development of *maquilas* in Honduras, I founded the *Asociación Colectiva de Mujeres Hondureñas* (CODEMUH) with two other women activists in 1989. CODEMUH focuses on organising, holistic education, and the

“Today, these same women workers and many more, once confined by their work and domestic lives, are activists”

promotion of women's rights among *maquila* workers, informal sector workers and housewives.

The organisation currently works on campaigns to pressure the government on issues such as occupational health, age discrimination, domestic violence and women's rights. CODEMUH also provides legal support, counselling and group therapy for survivors of violence.

I would describe CODEMUH as a socially-committed feminist organisation responding to neo-liberal economic reality and its impacts on women as well as to problems specific to patriarchy. During the first four years working with women in the *maquilas*, it was very difficult to get even three or four women workers together to talk openly about the abuse they were facing at work because of their fear of being fired. It was then common practice for companies to fire pregnant women immediately and to abuse workers physically and verbally. CODEMUH worked clandestinely, building contacts through mothers and neighbours concerned about what their daughters, sisters and friends were going through in the *maquila*.

I remember the turning point in CODEMUH's work in 1993: for the first time, I and other organisers had managed to bring together 50 women workers in a workshop, the outcome of which was the formulation of an education strategy. At first, I had to go and ask their husbands for permission. Today, these same women and many more, once confined by their work and domestic lives, are activists, forming strategies, launching campaigns, giving interviews to the press and training themselves to get better jobs. Although there are still many battles ahead, the gains are obvious.

Profile Lynda Yanz continued from page 87

for the workers in their supply chains. That understanding changed how we work, set new directions and connected us to a whole new movement, including the CCC. That was also the period when we extended our links to Asia, through an Asia-Latina exchange aimed at building links between women activists working on *maquila* issues in Asia and Latin America. In 2002 we began to build our first links with Africa, through a campaign in support of the Lesotho garment workers' union. Through the Lesotho campaign, we also for the first time developed a direct and more productive relationship with one of the brands—in this case Gap—in stark contrast to the antagonistic connection we had with the Canadian retailer that was sourcing from Lesotho, which refused dialogue and ended up “cutting and running” from the factory in question.

We don't use the word “gender” much at MSN. Garment workers = women, it's that simple. Right from day one, with the “merger” of MAM and SolidarityWorkers to create MSN we have tried always to make sure that women, women workers, and women's issues are central to what we do.

Where to next? MSN believes that our movement is at a crossroads. So much has changed in the last 10 or 11 years. We need to find ways to be more effective, more thoughtful, more collaborative and—perhaps most important—more humble. Yes, there are advances with major brands, but not a great deal has changed on the ground. We must accept that we cannot change the world single-handedly. More workers now understand their rights, and have become actors in improving their own working lives, but there is a long way to go to achieve sustainable



Bettina Musiolek

German CCC activist, coordinator CCC activities CEE

It all started with my studies. I studied economics, including the way that economy and society interrelate—a perspective deemed out of date by today's economists. Later, I spent a few years in Africa—a second opportunity to “study”. This time, I was able to see for myself the impact on women of policies such as the structural adjustment packages imposed by international financial institutions.

Back in the re-united Germany, I was looking for like-minded people in what felt like a very hostile West Germany. I found them in a women's organisation that was busy preparing for the 1995 United Nations World Conference of Women in Beijing. One of the group's focuses was women working in the garment industry. This was ideal for me. It had an economic, social, political, international, developmental and ecological dimension—everything I wanted to combine! And we dealt with these issues in very practical ways: we not only wrote nice papers for Beijing, we also conducted polls about consumer behaviour, left enquiries with shop assistants about where and in what conditions the clothes were produced, and performed “hit and run” sketches in department stores. Very soon we learned that there were other groups in countries with the same ideas and concerns: the Clean Clothes Campaign.

“What we offered was totally new to them: Westerners that wanted to cooperate rather than tell them how they have to see the world”

The geographical focus of the Clean Clothes Campaign was, rightly, the global “South”. Yet I was becoming aware that ever more garment production was moving to a part of the world that seemed to have disappeared from the map: Eastern Europe. For many in Western Europe, even within solidarity groups and trade unions, even for West Germans, Eastern Europe was very remote. Poland for them was further away than Africa. But for me, an East German who had travelled extensively in these countries and made friends there, Eastern Europe was a familiar terrain. I knew the way of thinking and feeling, I had experienced the hospitality and creativity, I knew some of the language. Eastern Europeans were experiencing problems very similar to those of East Germans—except that they didn't have rich “brothers and sisters” in the West.

From the mid '90s, it became clear that the problems identified in the Eastern European garment industry were the same as in the “South”: the same industrial model is used, the same exploitation of women takes place. Eastern Europe was experiencing a dramatic backlash in terms of social development, to an extent unseen before in its history. I saw concrete possibilities for raising awareness of that in the West and for building cooperation with local groups in the East.

But the CCC had no contacts there and solidarity campaigns, trade unions and the women's movement had little interest at that time in Eastern Europe. The CCC's first attempts at getting concrete information and establishing contacts were not followed up. I persevered, working to build links with interested groups and unions. There was widespread suspicion towards people from the West and a depressed mood throughout the region. The domi-

nance of the market economy logic seemed unsalable. There was no information on or interest in the situation of women in the garment industry.

Step by step, however, I began to meet with women in NGOs and trade unions who saw opportunities in the way the CCC works. What we offered was totally new to them: Westerners that wanted to cooperate rather than tell them how they have to see the world. We started to build networks, train women in how to gather information on the situation of garment workers and eventually found ways to raise public awareness in Eastern Europe itself. Step by step, we are now establishing genuine cooperation between East and West, as has been done between North and South. As a result, women activists in the East can make their voices heard and are growing in confidence.

And I have learned much from this global solidarity movement. I consider it the biggest privilege to have got to know and work with such courageous, creative, clear-sighted and warm women all over the world. Maria, Lek, Monina, Mi Kyung, Luminitza, Mariana, Verka, Kinga, Anifa, Regina, Majda, Katerina, Vanja, Dani—not to speak of all the great women in the CCC itself. My children know most of you by now, and hopefully will wage campaigns for women's rights in the future.



ELENA MALLEDO/OKFAM

Garment workers, Tangier, Morocco, 2005



Anna Rose Orange of the Sokowa union committee, involved in struggle against union repression at the Codevi factory, a Levi Strauss supplier in Haiti, pictured here with her niece, 2004



CLUST

International Women's Day demonstration in support of union activists dismissed from the MSP factory, a Nike and Decathlon supplier, Thailand, 2005

Trade Unions and the Struggle for Gender Justice

By Jasna Petrovic

A feminised, marginalised and unprotected workforce

Gender discrimination is evident throughout the world in access to resources, educational and economic opportunities and the distribution of political power and leadership positions. It is deeply rooted in all societies. While the feminisation of the global workforce continues (according to recent ILO data, approximately 45% of women aged 15-64 have jobs or are job seekers), women workers are paid between 30 and 60% less than men, are concentrated in low skill, undervalued and insecure jobs, frequently experience sexual harassment in the workplace, and suffer more and longer unemployment.

Women constitute about 80% of the 50 million strong workforce in the export processing zones (EPZs) which are multiplying around the world as governments seek low cost solutions to the increased competitive pressures of the global economy. EPZs provide employers with an environment in which trade union organisation is either prohibited or made practically impossible

and permit exploitative, dangerous and sometimes brutal practices of which women are the most frequent victims. This is particularly true of the garment industry.

At the same time, women make up the majority of workers with atypical or precarious jobs, such as part-time, temporary and casual work, or working from home. Almost half of non-agricultural women's work is in the informal economy, meaning that women workers are denied the minimum benefits and protection usually afforded by national regulations and are subject to sub-standard working conditions and the widespread denial of their fundamental rights. Women workers are very much in the majority in the informal garment industry. They are almost never members of trade unions and are therefore unprotected.

Women also constitute 48% of the world's migrants. The feminisation of migration and the extreme vulnerability of women migrants present urgent new challenges for global and national trade unions. Women migrants are segregated into some of the least protected and most ex-



exploited sectors of the global workforce and are increasingly being trafficked into illegal employment and prostitution.

Finally, women continue to bear the largest burden of family responsibilities. Most countries have so far failed to formulate genuinely family-friendly policies to support women at work and trade unions themselves do not pay sufficient attention to the needs of workers with such responsibilities.



Shop stewards working in Kenya's Athi River EPZ, including some from garment factories, participate in a weekend training program in 2004 to share experiences and learn more about multi-national companies.

The need for women's participation in trade unions

Over the past 20 years, the legal rights of powerful corporate entities have been dramatically extended. Thanks to the rules of the World Trade Organisation and regional and bilateral trade agreements, corporations now enjoy global protection for many newly introduced rights. As investors, the same companies are legally protected against a wide range of governments' actions. Workers' rights have moved in the opposite direction and it is no coincidence that this should have happened at the same time as the rise of the "flexible", female, sometimes migrant worker. The result is that corporate rights are becoming ever stronger while poor people's rights and protection at work are being weakened. It is women who are paying the social costs of such developments.

The average garment worker in Poland, for instance, is female, low paid, works long hours, has to contend with sexual harassment on the job and does not have a long-term contract. The only differences with her Bangladeshi sisters is one of degree—the degree of squalor, indignity and exploitation that workers with little choice are able to endure. In one factory in Cambodia, a slogan on the wall says: "do it once, do it right". When the women go to the toilet, they have to run; otherwise they and their team do not meet the

strict quota and do not get a bonus. The dormitories in which they sleep are not fit for humans. Whether Polish, Bangladeshi or Cambodian, these women are unlikely to be employed in a workplace that is unionised or where a collective bargaining agreement is in place.

Why do unions not react more strongly and visibly to offer greater protection? Though the history of workers' movements is full of inspiring stories about the struggles and achievements of garment workers, today's context is very different. Trade unions themselves are considerably weaker than they were a few decades ago and in most countries unfortunately remain dominated by white, middle-aged men. The majority of union leaders still do not understand that unions need women as much as women need unions. Many trade unions still do not realise that promoting gender-related policies and launching campaigns for organising women workers in both the formal and informal sectors should have priority, maybe are even the survival issue for trade unions as trade unions led only and exclusively by men are not going to survive.

In 1949, according to ICFTU archive data, only 7% of the world's women workers were organised in trade unions. Today, based on new ICFTU data collected from affiliates all over the world, women are increasingly forming the majority of trade union members. Such an increase is due mostly to the fact that women nowadays work in far greater numbers in the public sector which, in democratic countries, is still relatively tolerant of trade unions: public sector employees are mostly organised. It should be clear, however, that those figures relate mostly to the formal economy, leaving out free trade zone workers, homeworkers, street vendors and those working in agriculture and other sectors of the informal economy, where the rate of organising is very low or even nonexistent.

Yet the informal sector is an integral part of global production and marketing chains. From an economic point of view, the formal and informal sectors form an integral whole.

The deconstruction of the formal sector has led to a decline of trade union organisation everywhere: in leading industrialised countries as well as developing and transition countries. This means that the stabilisation of what remains of the trade union movement in the formal sector now depends on organising the informal sector. Only by organising the informal sector can the trade union movement maintain the critical mass in terms of membership and representativity that it needs to be a credible social and political force.

Encouragingly, trade unions all over the world are trying to reshape themselves so as to be able to organise workers in the informal economy. For example, the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA) is successfully organising homeworkers in its sector. UNITE in Canada also organises homeworkers in the garment industry. But in former communist countries, for instance, there are still many trade unions that have a constitution prohibiting them from organising workers who are not fully and formally employed. If those unions do not develop special strategies on how to approach women in the informal economy, they will lose legitimacy and membership.

Women's continued marginalisation in their own trade unions, although on average they constitute the majority of members, is an obvious threat to the survival of unions. There is at present a disconnection between trade union leadership—still male-dominated—and the rank and file. Unions need to recognise women as an important majority of their members and to transform themselves accordingly. They need to recognise the needs of women workers—especially in the informal economy, and to develop and lobby for family-friendly trade union and employment policies. Most importantly, legitimacy requires women's equal representation and influence on decision-making bodies dealing with trade union policy. If the voices heard at the top are not representative of workers, then unions will not be able to secure the support of their membership and will prove unsustainable.

Trade unions, especially the two global trade union confederations—the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) and the WCL (World Confederation of Labour), which are merging and together with the “sectoral” global trade unions represent some 200 million workers in the world, increasingly need to promote new policies with regard to women workers. These policies must lead to:

- ▶ more and better jobs for women;
- ▶ gender equity in trade unions’ decision-making bodies and in all trade union activities, collective bargaining included;
- ▶ the inclusion of family-related issues in collective bargaining;
- ▶ equal pay for work of equal value;
- ▶ gender awareness for men and women union members and employers;
- ▶ the end of violence against women at work; and
- ▶ life-long education for women workers, in particular vocational training.

Ensuring the full integration of women into trade unions and promoting gender equity in activities and decision-making at all levels is one of the future constitutional aims of the common global trade union confederation after the ICFTU and WCL merge in 2006. The ICFTU and WCL are working on building a special pan-European structure which would bring together women from East and West, a special budget being foreseen to fund its activities. It should be noted that the women’s networks from both global confederations were the first to unite their structures in October 2005.

The example of Central and Eastern Europe

Both global confederations are re-checking all trade union policies and decisions from a gender perspective, especially in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (NIS) region. The ICFTU set up a “CEE Women’s Network” in November 1997, following a regional workshop organised in Gdansk (Poland) which brought together 34 trade union women’s sections from 24 former communist countries. According to a report prepared for the regular Regional Women’s Conference held in 2005 in Macedonia, the level of representation of women in CEE trade unions has improved during the last four years, thanks to the work of the region’s women’s sections:

- ▶ women’s membership of CEE trade unions was on average higher: 50.3% of total union membership in 2003 compared with 43.6% in 1999;
- ▶ although the proportion of women attending congress was slightly lower (27.6% in 2005 compared to 27.8% in 1999), women’s participation was more visible: women took to the floor more, had their own information stands, drafted special resolutions, etc.;
- ▶ women were better represented at the decision-making level of trade unions, mostly due to the democratic transformation of such bodies, mostly pushed for by women’s sections;
- ▶ the percentage of women found in high positions and decision-making bodies in the regional trade union confederation increased from 21% in 2000 to 24.5% in 2005. Although we are not even halfway to parity this is a positive change and is due mainly to the strengthening of women’s sections in the region’s trade unions. Today, two thirds of women’s sections are a formal part of the structure of the union (twice more than four years ago) and almost 50% have a reserved seat on unions’ decision-

making bodies (three times more than five years ago).

While these are hopeful first steps there is more work to be done. Two thirds of women’s sections hold separate women’s conferences regularly, but only six women’s sections have their own budget, only eight have their own office, only fifteen have access to the internet and only two are legally, independently constituted.

In May 2003, a survey on the impact of gender-related policy measures was conducted within the ICFTU CEE & NIS Women’s Network. The results probably tell us more than would written reports: as the survey was anonymous, women felt they could reply safely. They estimated that:

- ▶ understanding and support of male trade union leaders for gender-related issues is low (5.8 out of 10);
- ▶ the value male union leaders give to the activities of women’s sections in their confederation is low (6.2 out of 10), while the public values the activities of women trade unionists more highly (7 out of 10);
- ▶ the influence of women’s sections, networks, committees, etc. on trade union policies is low (only 5 out of 10).

The same survey revealed that 46% of trade union confederations do not keep gender-related statistics; only 46% show a certain gender sensitivity in writing trade union documents; only 54% have gender parity regarding participation in trade unions’ educational programmes; 38% have gender parity in delegations and 15% only in bargaining teams. The women’s sections are consulted on gender-related issues before adopting decisions in 54% of confederations.

Parallel to the ICFTU, the WCL set out to promote working women’s rights by launching a network of female trade unionists in 1997. The WCL’s European Women’s Network is composed of 10 women officers from each national organisation. Annual seminars are also organised to increase women’s understanding of gender-related issues, assess the implementation of the previous action

plan and elaborate a new one. It is this network which has put gender issues on the agenda of the WCL and its affiliated trade union confederations.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which brings together all European trade unions, adopted its new equality plan in 2003. The plan has three main objectives: to eliminate the female representation gap in decision-making bodies in trade unions; to extend the gender mainstreaming of unions (primarily by including gender issues in collective bargaining and/or collective bargaining guidelines), and to strengthen the role of the body responsible for gender equality policy in trade unions. It is important to emphasize that EU Member States are obliged by the European Employment Strategy to seek ways to reconcile work and family life.

Challenges and ways forward

Hiring workers on temporary contracts or without contracts, the lack of any protection against dismissal, very low salaries and the lack of control over working hours and conditions, have all become a global problem. In the garment industry, fierce competition puts most contractors, or factories, in a “take it or leave it” position, where they must accept whatever low price is offered by manufacturers if they do not want to see the work go to another factory. Prices are driven down so low that factories are unable to pay legal wages or comply with health and safety regulations. The structure of the industry forces most sub-contractors to “sweat” profits out of the workers, cut corners and operate unsafe workplaces. Within this system, retailers and manufacturers claim they do not directly employ garment workers and are not responsible for workers’ wages and working conditions. But retailers and manufacturers exercise tremendous control over the garment production chain and have the power to ensure fair working conditions, including the enforcement of workers’ right to organise and bargain collectively.

Patterns of work and the way in which business is organised have changed greatly, posing a challenge to those organising workers to keep pace

with these changes. In recent years, however, trade union membership has fallen steadily and unions failed to show the ability to change their strategy accordingly. In former communist countries, especially in the Baltic countries and Poland, trade union membership is at 10 to 20% of the formal workforce, compared to less than 9% in France, 13% in the US and less than 20% in Japan. Unions cannot continue to operate under old outdated frameworks and have to acknowledge head on the nature and impact of global restructuring.

The main challenge for unions all over the world is how to organise the unorganised, especially the young, the women, the informal economy workers and others kinds of atypical workers. Unions should find new allies, new channels and new tools. They will have to build new strategies together with the NGO sector and to establish new partnerships and forms of organising. Studies conducted by the ILO in the early 1980s reveal the extent of women's home-based work in developing countries. After learning from SEWA's experiences in organising piece-rate workers,¹ the ILO initiated a programme for organ-

Union Women in the Classroom

In 2000 the ICFTU CEE & NIS Women's Network launched the International Women's Trade Union School. Its goals are to:

- ▷ **determine priorities for future action, and develop action plans around them;**
- ▷ **build necessary skills and knowledge;**
- ▷ **strengthen women's sections within trade unions;**
- ▷ **strengthen internal democracy within trade unions;**
- ▷ **enhance the regional network of women's sections within trade unions;**
- ▷ **build coalitions around women's trade union and labour issues; and**
- ▷ **benefit from each other's experience (for instance the promotion of non-conflict policies during recent conflicts and cross-border cooperation).**

In practice the School, which every year in October brings together some 80-140 women from 20 to 30 countries, has achieved many other goals, such as developing conflict-prevention policies and activities; transforming trade union policies on gender, working families, internal democracy and non-discrimination. The fifth Women's School in October 2004, on "The Impact of Social Reforms on Women and Collective Bargaining", was the first organised jointly by ICFTU and WCL women representatives.

This school is a unique initiative, highly commended by both global unions and seen as a model which could be easily duplicated elsewhere. Its impact on unions is visible: women replicate regional campaigns at the national level, develop networks at the local level, run their own projects, fight for stronger influence on trade union policy and work to increase the representation of women in trade union decision-making bodies.

ising homeworkers in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia. This programme ran from 1988 to 1996 with the support of the Danish government, and has resulted in many new grassroots organisations, a national network in each country, and the beginnings of regional organisation. Almost all the groups in these three countries are women's NGOs, with very little trade union involvement.

Organising takes many forms and trade unions should not be afraid of the fact that they cannot organise informal workers in the same way as they do formal workers. Informal sector workers are already organising, partly using existing trade union structures from the formal sector, partly into new unions that they have created themselves, partly into associations which are sometimes described as NGOs but which are often in fact proto-unions. International networks of informal workers already exist, which facilitate the exchange of valuable experience and provide points of leverage for the entire trade union movement. Such networks are either part of the trade union movement already or they are its closest partners and allies. Any discussion on organising the informal sector should include as a matter of course those who are already doing the job of supporting workers.

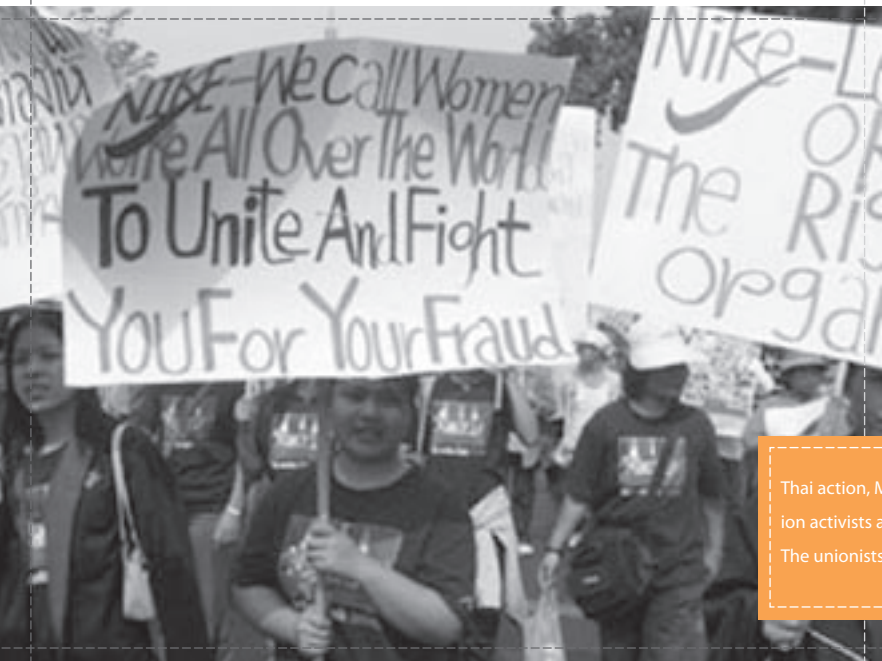
Garment workers' rights to speak up and resist exploitation or organise a union are weakened by garment companies' ability to move elsewhere (since garment manufacture does not require skilled workers) to avoid workers' demands. It is known that the many urgent appeals the CCC deals with are almost always about unions being prevented from operating freely or workers being prevented from organising into free and independent unions. The threat that forming a union will lead to relocation is always there. There is no doubt that unions need to have a more coordinated response in order to ensure that the rights to organise and bargain collectively are enforced, and to protect their members and activists against retaliation from employers. Unfortunately, many national level trade unions do not understand the nature of globalisation and operate from a nationalistic or protectionist position, which pits

workers against each other. Employers, especially multi-national companies, take advantage of this. Workers need to know more about where they fit in global supply chains. More and more of the websites of global trade unions address this issue, showing how companies link into one another to make it easier for trade unionists all over the world to know where their own company fits in. Without more and better connection, communication and solidarity with workers in other parts of the world, it is difficult to imagine how the trade unions of the future will battle for workers' rights.

While it is not the sole element of the solution, a major organising drive is necessary, particularly as the garment sector is relatively unprotected compared with the metal, wood and food industries. More and more trade unions at a global sectoral level negotiate voluntary collective agreements with the largest multi-national companies. Although the content of such global collective agreements is usually very weak, at least they recognise the eight basic international labour standards of the International Labour Organisation and impose common standards in the entirety of multinationals' facilities.

The main purpose of a framework agreement is to establish a formal on-going relationship between the multi-national company and the global union federation in order to solve problems and work in the interests of both parties. In practice, this means a commitment to observing international labour standards. For the unions in the country where the company is based, this means that the international operations of a given company become a legitimate subject of discussion and negotiation. This can be crucial where outsourcing occurs, as it commonly does in the garment industry. The idea is obviously to proceed from existing framework agreements to real global collective agreements.

Although global unions prefer bi-lateral agreements, such as global framework agreements, as a means to protect workers' rights, multi-national companies increasingly hold up their one-sided "codes of conduct" to assure the public that they



Thai action, March 2005, supporting MSP union activists and calling for union recognition. The unionists were eventually reinstated.

care about labour standards down the supply chain. Codes of conduct can make a difference: multi-nationals are vulnerable to reports of abuses that violate the very standards they are committed to enforcing and can damage the image multi-nationals have spent millions to promote. But agreements between sectoral global trade unions and multi-nationals are stronger tools than codes of conduct in that they are bi-partite rather than unilateral.

Although garment companies have been keen to formulate codes of conduct in response to consumer campaigns, many of these are simply public relations exercises. In our experience, codes of conduct have only ever made a difference where the right to organise is enforced: workers who are not already empowered through their belonging to a trade union or another support organisation will find it very difficult to push for enforcement of the rights set out in a code.

Trade unions' international outreach also makes them ideal vehicles for the promotion of campaigns among their members. Unions have, for instance, compiled a register of "dirty companies" who are directly responsible for serious violations of labour rights and have consistently ignored demands for improvements. They have made public a list of employers that are cooperating with the government of Burma, the aim being to drive renegade companies from the industry by calling on their existing customers to sever their contracts and on their potential customers to refrain from placing orders.

Worldwide, women are still paid between 10% and 50% less than men for doing similar work or jobs of comparable worth, and the wage gap is particularly marked in the garment industry. Accordingly, as part of the Global Union's Campaign "Women for Unions, Unions for Women", the ITGLWF global garment union in 2003 launched a campaign to bring women's wages up to the same level as their male counterparts. While

it is not easy to measure the impact of the campaign, pressure was at least applied and awareness raised.

Because campaigning works, global trade unions, in the lead up to the World Cup 2006, plan to launch a new campaign against violations of fundamental labour standards in the sportswear industry, aiming to secure broad support in order to put pressure on the FIFA to renegotiate and enforce the code of conduct first negotiated with ICFTU in the late 1990s.

The globalising of the world economy requires a global trade union response. Trade unions should launch a wide-ranging examination of the structural changes needed in union organisation in the garment sector to combat the negative impacts of globalisation. Unions need to improve coordination and engage in strategic cooperation in order to avoid the duplication of activities, maximise the use of resources and avoid unnecessary conflict at the international level. Indeed, a lot is being done in that direction.

They need to maintain the strength of solidarity and to present their case forcefully and aggressively to an often hostile world. This will necessarily involve strengthening regional and international trade union structures and delegating authority to them in certain spheres of activity.

Trade unions will have to strengthen their networks to turn the tide against rights' abuses in the workplace, especially women's. Weak unions do not have the ability to represent their members with civil society, nor can they serve as a counterweight to employers' violations of basic rights. Trade union unity is a pre-requisite for the successful defence of workers' interests.

What is at issue is not only to get the international trade union movement into shape and to turn it into an effective fighting organisation but to organise and unify the wider social movement through common action, involving the whole array of civil society organisations: human rights organisations, solidarity organisations, women's movements, movements for the defence of the environment, of minorities, informal sector organisations and also political parties to the extent that they remain supportive of our movement and loyal to its objectives. I don't think this is asking the impossible.

¹ The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), formed in India in 1972, is the world's first trade union of self-employed women workers. Operating on the principle of self-help, SEWA supports self-employed women in achieving work, food and income security as well as social security. It aims to strengthen women's leadership, confidence and bargaining power (both within and outside the home) as well as their representation in policy- and decision-making. Led by women, it has made visible the contribution of informal women workers to the country's economy.

See the following websites for more resources on gender and worker organising:

www.ilo.org
www.wiego.org
www.icftu.org
www.global-unions.org
www.cmt-wcl.org
www.global-labour.org

See also:
 Petrovic, J.A. (2000) "The Male Face of Trade Unions in Central and Eastern Europe", ICFTU.

And:
 ICFTU (2004) Negotiating Better Working and Living Conditions/ Gender Mainstreaming in Collective Bargaining (kits 1, 2, 3, 4), in ICFTU-WCL-ILO Manual, 2004-2005.



Emelia Yanti MD Siahaan

Union organiser and gender program officer, GSBi

I come from North Sumatra and am the second child of six brothers and sisters. My father, while he was alive, worked as a driver and my mother to this day works as a vegetable trader in the market. Earlier, I had hoped to become a police officer, but my father was very hostile to the police.

I finished junior high school but dropped out in the second year of senior high school because my father suddenly lost his job as a driver. I started looking for work in factories in Bogor to keep my sister at school. My brother also had to work.

In 1991, at sixteen I started work at a garment factory called PT Tri Nunggal Komara Garment. My first job was as a warehouse worker but a year later, management moved me to quality control. My new position was harder than the previous one: I couldn't take a rest, was prohibited from going to the toilet and my supervisor would have a go at me if I sat down for a minute during a 10-hour shift spent mostly standing. Reaching production targets was everything for the company. If workers didn't reach their target, they were threatened with dismissal or had to work overtime without pay.

“...Instead of forever looking for a factory offering better wages and conditions, we needed to organise ourselves...”

My first salary was \$60 a month, increased to \$70 in 1993. There were no other benefits until 1994, when I also got a meal and transport allowance of \$16. The same year, I became a permanent worker. Low wages meant that the only way to live “normally” was through overtime. When I got desperate about the long working hours and the exploitation, I thought of what my work meant to my family.

In 1994, I moved to the sewing section of PT Yulinda Duta Fashion, but only for eight months. We were constantly working overtime and the wages weren't enough for our daily living expenses. In the middle of 1995 I moved to PT Garuda Nata Indah Garment, which produced for Eddie Bauer, Bugle Boy and Levi Strauss. But I lost my job when the factory closed as a result of being in debt to the bank, leaving the wages of about 250 workers unpaid for four months. That factory was worse than the previous one. Sometimes, when orders were urgent, I worked from 7 a.m. to 6 a.m. the following day.

Mid-way through 1996, I started work at PT Busana Perkasa Garment in Bogor. This was a large factory employing 4,000 workers producing for Levi Strauss, Dockers, Nike and Ralph Lauren among others. Wages were reasonable if you worked overtime every day. But conditions were oppressive and we only got one day off per month—the day our wages were handed out.

In 1997, I went to work for PT Kaisar Laksmi Mas Garment, a Korean factory that produced jackets for various labels including C&A. Though conditions were no better than anywhere else, there I met a friend who taught me about my rights as a worker. I realised then that, instead of forever looking for a factory offering better wages and conditions, we

needed to organise ourselves and call on management to make improvements. I and other workers formed the first independent union and called it ABGTeks (Asosiasi Buruh Garmen dan Tekstil), separate from the government union SPSTK.

Ten months later, I took up the CCC's invitation to attend their International Forum in Brussels in April 1998. I spoke about workers' conditions in garment factories producing for Levi's in front of hundreds of people! I knew after that that workers in Indonesia are not alone in their struggle. When I came back I had to choose between continuing with factory work and becoming a full-time organiser. I chose to organise and help other workers form unions in their workplaces.

My mother was the first one to encourage me to stop work and become active in the trade union. She's been my greatest inspiration. Although she never completed her own basic education, for ten years my mother who sold vegetables in the market was able to send her six children to school as high as Middle High School (SMA), except for myself who only achieved Class 2 at SMA school because of the economic situation of our family. My mother certainly prioritised the education of her children because she did not want us to experience what she did; she did not differentiate between her boy and girl children, whether on the question of education or in housework. When I chose to work in the union, my mother only said to me: “If that is your choice and you believe in it, then do it and be responsible for what you have chosen”.

There was also Marsinah, although I never met her. You may have heard of her.¹ She was brave enough

Profile Emelia Yanti MD Siahaan continued from page 103

to struggle for her rights as a worker. She didn't know of the cruelty of employers and the military, though. In the end, they took her life because she opposed them; she demanded her rights and those of her comrades.

In 1999, ABGteks and other unions formed GSBI, the Federation of Independent Unions. We understood that our struggle against big corporations had to be in cooperation with other unions but also with consumer organisations and NGOs. GSBI is not a big federation and does not have much funding but it is efficient and effective.

Factories tend to recruit women with poor educational backgrounds, many of them from rural areas where women are still second to men and therefore are used to being obedient. Of course, working women become more self-reliant and less dependent economically on their husband and parents. Some are freer to make their own decisions, whether to provide for their own needs from the money they have earned or to improve their knowledge and skills by studying, for example.

But although employment has made them less dependent, Indonesian women still experience the "double burden": although a woman worker has already worked a full day in the factory (and more if she had to work overtime), housework is still her responsibility, whether as wife or daughter. She must organise the house, wash clothes, cook, look after children, and serve her husband. Women workers do not have time to do anything else.

It's not easy in these circumstances to get involved with trade unions. That's why there are so few women leaders in trade union structures, particularly in strategic positions. Where men dominate, trade unions are seen as the world of men rather than women.

My wish is that workers in all countries know their rights. Knowing our rights as workers is a way to respect our dignity as human beings. History shows how the strength and movement of workers and women all over the world can change the world and the system in one's own country.

I also hope for the movement that a school can be set up for women workers who had to abandon their studies—to enable them to raise the quality of their knowledge. I myself am trying to get back into the education I had to abandon previously, and to find financial support so I can study. This is not because I have great faith in the formal education system, but so that I know about more than the labour and trade union movement.

¹ Marsinah was a 24-year old factory worker and labour activist. Her mutilated body was discovered in a forest on May 8, 1993. Her killers, widely thought to be soldiers, were never brought to justice. Marsinah had led a two-day strike at a watch-making factory in East Java, demanding that workers be paid the legal minimum wage. A witness saw her forced into a van by men fitting the description of military personnel. She was raped, beaten, tortured and left to die.

CCC Solidarity Action for Women Organising

In addition to pushing for systemic change in the global garment industry, each year the CCC takes action on dozens of urgent cases of workers' rights violations in the garment and sports shoe industries. The majority of these cases involves workers who try to organise in the face of bad working conditions and a harsh anti-union environment. A CCC "urgent appeal", as these cases are commonly known, is a request that people take action to demonstrate support for workers' demands in a situation where their rights are not being respected (ex. by writing a letter of protest to a factory owner or company sourcing at a factory). This is one way that the CCC stimulates direct solidarity action by its supporters to put pressure on brands and retailers to take concrete steps to support the workers who make their products.

To learn more about how the this urgent appeal system works, please see the following brochure on the CCC website: www.cleanclothes.org/

[ftp/UA_leaflet.pdf](#). This document provides information on how the CCC decides which cases to take up—for example, only where it is clear that this is what the workers involved in the dispute want. Plus there is information on the actions that the CCC and supporters may take, and how this is coordinated. There is also advice on how to inform the CCC about a potential urgent appeals case. At the moment this brochure is available in English though translation into other languages is underway.

Those interested in supporting workers via this urgent appeals system and receiving CCC urgent appeals by e-mail are invited to join the Clean Clothes Campaign Urgent Action Network. Through these appeals you will get updates on cases the CCC is working on and suggestions for specific actions you can take on these cases.

To sign up send an e-mail to: ccc-news-subscribe@cleanclothes.org



Demonstration in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2005, demanding justice for the Spectrum-Shahriyar workers and their families, after the garment factory collapsed killing 64 and injuring dozens more



June Hartley

Programme officer, Solidarity Center, South Africa

My involvement in the trade union movement spans almost 32 years now, with some breaks during the apartheid years when I went to study in England. In 1983, I went to Ruskin College for two years and obtained a diploma in labour studies. Then to the University of Warwick where I obtained a master's degree in the sociology of labour. Back in South Africa, I lectured in the sociology departments of the University of Cape Town and then the University of Natal. During that time, I also worked hard to set up the workers' college in Durban, which has been going since 1990 and provides education for workers in a systematic way. I teach there from time to time. In 1997-98 I went back to England to study for a master's in business administration.

I began my working life aged 18, in a factory owned by a textile company known for its poor pay and conditions. I was a weaver then and the factory was filthy and the conditions unbearable. We began to fight for improvements, we being the first group of women to be employed in this company in 1971. After some conflicts with management that included stoppages and strikes, we made some progress. I do not know how but I became a leader in this factory. I was not afraid and had a good sense of right and wrong, and maybe it was

“...The issue of gender discrimination remains as difficult as racism”

these qualities that pushed me forward. The apartheid government was not in favour of unions but that did not stop us. We quickly learned that bosses everywhere look after their own and that workers will never be handed their rights on a silver platter but will always have to fight for them. Later on, I was elected to be an executive member of the newly formed National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW), the precursor of today's South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU).

The garment and textile workforce today is predominantly female (80-90%) and works in conditions which it is difficult to separate from the general attitude towards women. Women are viewed as second-class citizens whose rights do not matter. Most of the trade unions representing garment and textile workers pay lip service only to the workers' struggle and have few realistic strategies to take on the giants who employ us. These unions are led predominantly by men, some of whom sit in positions of power within the labour movement but have forgotten the actual purpose of unions and have grown too comfortable to keep alive the will to fight. If women do not organise and fight for themselves, it will take generations to change the situation for the better.

Gender issues are therefore a crucial part of my work. I have been involved in training for gender coordinators and then going to other countries to work with the coordinators to train others. Whilst the training begins with awareness building, it also deals with the issue of participation and the recognition of women as key partners in the process. In some countries, leadership elections are beginning to better reflect the 80% female membership of the union. But generally, the issue of gender discrimination remains as difficult as racism.

After working with the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), I went to work for the Solidarity Center.¹ My work consists mostly of providing support and mentoring—at the moment in Namibia. I have been working with NAFU (Namibian Food and Allied Workers Union), an affiliate of the ITGLWF, focusing mostly on Ramatex, a company located in the EPZ with the usual unspeakable working conditions. I have been assisting with rebuilding the union at the shop-floor level and with the training of shop stewards and organisers—not only in recruiting but also in ensuring that workers are directly involved in their union's activities. That is how you strengthen the union from within.

A lot still needs to be done in terms of organising and creating a space where women can find out more about what they want and how to get there. We need to sharpen our thinking and our analysis of the social movement if we are to avoid chasing illusions and mirages.

I am lucky that I had good role models. My grandmother, Alice Khumalo, was heavily involved in the community of Amatata and raised me with a good sense of right and wrong, and my mother Ntombifuthi, who was a community nurse and later a health inspector, taught me a lot about altruism.

¹ The Solidarity Center is the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, a non-profit organisation launched by the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in 1997, which provides a range of education, training, research, legal support, organising assistance, and other resources to help build trade unions around the world.



Sandra Ramos

Founder/coordinator, Maria Elena Cuadra

I have been involved in trade unions since working in the meat industry as a teenager. I am from a poor family of eight sisters, and learned to defend my rights and stick to my principles from my mother and grandmother. Throughout the Sandinista revolution, I was an activist and union leader. The revolution opened up spaces for us Nicaraguan women—to learn about our rights and meet leaders from women's movements around the world. But in the early 1990s, with an economy destroyed by war, the government of Nicaragua accepted investment from some of the worst *maquila* employers in the region. In 1993, the Sandinista union movement went on strike at one of the first *maquilas* in Nicaragua, a company that had been kicked out of Costa Rica for labour rights violations. The strike was violent and I was hospitalised. The struggle, however, led to the first union to be set up in a *maquila* in Nicaragua, where 90% of the workers are women.

I left the labour movement shortly after due to conflicts over the position of women's issues in the union's priorities. Together with hundreds of other women unionists, we formed the Maria Elena Cuadra women's movement (MEC)¹ in order to continue working for women's labour rights separate from the union movement. MEC has organised national

“The mission of MEC is to demand not only recognition of women's rights but also the realisation of those rights at work and in the home”

campaigns to improve labour and civil rights for women since 1993. It has successfully pushed for legal reforms and expanded civil rights for working class women in Nicaragua. Due to the organisation's efforts, domestic violence and sexual abuse are now recognised by the government of Nicaragua as public health issues. As far as I am concerned, the mission of MEC is to demand not only recognition of women's rights but also the realisation of those rights at work and in the home.

Since the early 1990s, globalisation has kept women's economic rights at the fore of the women's movement's agenda in Nicaragua. The union movement and the women's movement have begun to work together again, respecting each other's different agendas and coordinating around common interests.

In 1997, MEC led a successful campaign for a code of ethics in the workplace that was eventually recognised by the Ministry of Labour and incorporated into legal reforms. The code represents a vehicle to combat violations of workers' rights by employers. Today, MEC continues to pressure the government to enforce labour standards. Aside from the daily work of providing legal and health services to women, MEC is also organising a national campaign to improve health and safety in the workplace in Nicaragua.

What drives us, simply, is the hope that a better world is possible. That's what inspires us to continue to fight for the women of our country.

¹ Maria Elena Cuadra led a women's organisation in the district of Diriamba, where she organised domestic workers, and was a friend and colleague of several of the founders of MEC. A leader and grassroots activist, she was very dear to the women of her community and to MEC. When she died, a month before the official launch of MEC, 800 of us voted that the new organisation be named after her—in memory of the contribution she had made to the women's movement.



Angela Hale

Coordinator, Women Working Worldwide

Women Working Worldwide (WWW) was set up by myself and a few other women in the mid 1980s. We had become concerned about the plight of young women being drawn into the newly-established free trade zones of Asia and had begun to develop links with researchers and activists in countries such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines. These women were beyond the reach of trade unions and aid agencies had yet to respond to their situation. We decided to act as an autonomous solidarity group and to look for funding to build wider support in the UK. We raised funds for a project on the garment industry at the end of the 1980s and the garment sector has been central to our work ever since. Labour Behind the Label, the UK arm of the CCC, grew out of an alliance between WWW, Homenet and Norfolk Education and Action for Development (NEAD), which started in the mid 1990s.

Working as a small women's organisation has been very satisfying and productive for me. Due to the kind of relationships established with activists in Asia and Africa, we have been able to work around the bureaucratic, male hierarchies of both trade unions and development organisations and reach directly to the women workers and activists themselves.

“Putting women workers centre stage means developing different ways of working”

When we began, we found that these activists were themselves developing new and innovative ways of organising unknown to the established labour movement—putting on mock “funerals” of companies, wearing T-shirts inside out to demonstrate solidarity on a particular issue, etc. The aims of the actions were the same—to claim workers’ right to organise and bargain collectively—but the methods used demonstrated a new and woman-oriented approach to organising.

Through WWW, women activists come together because of a shared commitment to women workers—which goes beyond divisions relating to politics or religion or whether activists are from NGOs or trade unions. Networking in this way has meant that many of the barriers to collective action have disappeared. Activists have also gained energy from each other and knowledge and confidence to take forward their work. This is important in itself because most women activists have to operate in labour movements where women are still largely marginalised.

WWW undertakes collaborative projects with women worker organisations and trade unions, whose work increasingly focuses on the situation of women workers. It is dialogue with these network members—in Asia and Africa but also Latin America and Eastern Europe—that is crucial to the direction of our work. From that work, we have learned that not only is there a need to develop a gendered approach but also that putting women workers centre stage means developing different ways of working. I suppose one thing I see myself as having done is to have encouraged and facilitated this way of working. I have ensured that all project proposals have emerged from consultative processes and incorporated non-hierarchical and flexible programmes of work.



1997 UK action in support of workers from the Eden factory in Thailand

We rarely talk about gender within WWW project work! By working together as women, gender issues are automatically incorporated in our agenda: it is taken for granted that women's reproductive needs must be taken into account and it is not possible to divide issues at work from the way in which work impacts on the rest of women workers' lives. By organising successfully in the community rather than the workplace and by including women's rights in bargaining procedures with both employers and government officials, women activists in numerous countries have demonstrated the importance of this gendered approach.

Our key partners in the “North” are mostly organisations where it is women again who have taken the lead. Remarkably, many of the women activists involved have been committed to the work for ten years or more. This means we witness the changes. When we started, most retailers did not see themselves as having any responsibility for working conditions in their supply chains and refused any form of dialogue. The fact that we are now treated with respect and as a valuable channel for the voices of women workers is itself a tribute to what a few women activists can achieve.



Demonstration in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2005,
demanding justice for the Spectrum-Shahriyar
workers and their families



Swiss CCC action during the
Play Fair at the Olympics
Campaign, 2004

Selected Resources

Publications

Action Research on Garment Industry Supply Chains: Some Guidelines for Activists, compiled by Jennifer Hurley, Angela Hale, and Joanne Smith (WWW, 2003)

This manual provides basic information on doing action research along supply chains, an introduction to the aims of action research and an overview of how supply chains operate. It provides an overview of different research techniques as well as a guide to doing research on the Internet. Included is information on doing a gender analysis of research findings. Available at http://www.women-ww.org/action_Research.pdf.

As Women As Workers (CAW, 1994)

A cartoon book for Asian workers and organisers. A collection of the various methodologies used by CAW network members for organising, education and training from diverse yet strikingly similar cultural and national backgrounds. A compilation of gender-sensitive training modules contributed by women's and women workers' organisations in different Asian countries.

Birth of Resistance: Stories of Eight Women Workers Activists by Park Min-na, translated by Sarah Eunkyung Chee (Korea Democracy Foundation, 2005)

Extremely compelling oral history of the lives of women activists who played leadership roles in the struggle for workers' rights in South Korea in the 1970s and '80s. Their stories shed light not only on the self-sacrifice, discrimination, growth and inspiration they experienced as activists, but also provide a view into the reality faced by women workers in the garment, textile and electronics industries, as well as important insight into the development of Korea's labour movement.

Company Codes of Conduct: What are they? Can We Use Them? by Celia Mather (WWW, 1998)

An education pack for workers and labour rights activists, including those interested in building common campaigns between workers and consumers. The purpose is to provide workers with information about company codes of conduct and to help them evaluate how a code might help them win better working conditions. Ten modules with facilitator's notes.

Gender and Global Labor Organizing: Migrant Women Workers of Garment Industry in South China, by Jenny Wai-ling Chan (*Chinese Working Women Network*, 2005)

Examines the labour conditions of internal migrant women peasant-workers in the garment industry in the Guangdong province of southern China, including working and living conditions in small- to medium-sized subcontracting garment workshops as well as in bigger factories supplying international brands. Documents how CWWN strives to link up local labour organising practices to global worker rights movement.

Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites and Resistances, edited by Marianne H. Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan (*Routledge*, 2000)

This book draws attention to the complexities and contradictions inherent in gender and global restructuring and highlights how restructuring not only relates to the material but also to identity and geography.

Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women, by Ching-Kwan Lee (*University of California Press*, 1998)

Yuk-ling, a busy Hong Kong mother of two, and Chi-ying, a young single woman from a remote village in northern China, do the same work in two electronics factories owned by the same foreign corporation. Ching Kwan Lee demonstrates in her study that the working lives of these women are vastly different. Having worked side-by-side with them on the floors of both factories, Lee concludes that it is primarily the differences in the gender politics of the two labour markets that determine the culture of each factory. Lee argues that gender plays a crucial role in the cultures and management strategies of factories that rely heavily on women workers.

Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories, by Leslie Salzinger (*University of California Press*, 2003)

This ethnographic work and analysis captures the feel of life inside the *maquiladoras* and makes a compelling case that transnational production is a gendered process. The research grounds contemporary feminist theory in an examination of daily practices and provides a valuable perspective on globalisation.

The Global Construction of Gender: Home-based work in the political economy of the 20th century, by Elisabeth Prügl (*Columbia University Press*, 1999)

A study of homework, exploring the debates and rhetoric surrounding home-based workers that have taken place in global movements and multilateral organisations since the early 1900s. Aims to trace changing conceptions of gender over the course of this century.

The Globalized Women: Reports from a Future of Inequality, by Christa Wichterich (*Zed Books*, 2000)

Looks at women across the world to show how their lives have been turned upside down, by industrialisation in the South and a return to homeworking in the North.

Good Jobs' and Hidden Costs: Women Workers Documenting the Price of Precarious Employment, by Thalia Kidder and Kate Raworth (*Oxfam International*, 2004)

Describes the precarious terms and conditions of employment experienced by women garment workers and defines the hidden costs to workers (out of pocket costs, income and benefits foregone, human development costs) of precarious employment. Available at http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/downloads/gdt_kidder_and_raworth.pdf.

The Hidden Assembly Line: Gender Dynamics of Subcontracted Work in a Global Economy, edited by Radhika Balakrishnan (*Kumarian Press*, 2002)

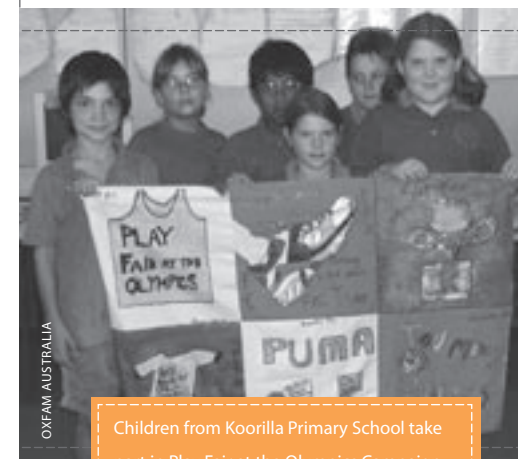
This book focuses on the impact of subcontracted work in different national settings, linking it to the global economy and to changes in women's financial security and work opportunities. The contributors debate the implications for women's empowerment and for the changing social relations of production. Includes case studies from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and India.

Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace, by Ngai Pun (*Duke University Press*, 2005)

Focuses on an electronics factory in southern China's Guangdong province, in the Shenzhen special economic zone where foreign-owned factories are proliferating. For eight months, the author slept in the employee dormitories and worked on the shop floor alongside the women whose lives she chronicles. Pun looks at the workers' perspectives and experiences, describes the lure of the consumer world and the minutiae of factory life. She looks at acts of resistance and transgression in the workplace, suggests that a silent social revolution is under way in China and that these young migrant workers are its agents.

Participatory Social Auditing: A Practical Guide to Developing a Gender-sensitive Approach, by Diane Auret and Stephanie Barrientos (*Institute of Development Studies*, 2004)

IDS working paper that explores a participatory approach to codes of labour practice. It presents an overview of the characteristics of such an approach, and contrasts them with "snapshot" social auditing. It is aimed at policymakers and practitioners interested in developing a gender-sensitive approach to participatory social auditing and codes of labour practice. Draws upon Auret's experiences as coordinator of an ETI pilot project on horticulture in Zimbabwe. Available at <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/wp/wp237.pdf>.



Children from Koorilla Primary School take part in Play Fair at the Olympics Campaign activity, Australia, 2004

Refashioning Resistance: Women Workers Organising in the Global Garment Industry, by Linda Shaw (*WWW*, 2004)

This book draws upon the work of Women Working Worldwide and partner organisations, as well as academic research and UN agencies, to present a picture of how women are organising to change the global garment industry to ensure decent jobs. She shows that "far from being the passive victims of an exploitative situation, women workers can develop innovative forms of collective action."

Rethinking Empowerment: Gender and Development in a Global/Local World, by Jane L. Parpart, Shirin M. Raj and Kathleen A. Staudt (*Routledge/Warwick Studies in Globalisation*, 2003)

The authors conclude that power must be restored as the centrepiece of empowerment in order to provide meaningful ammunition for dealing with the challenges of an increasingly unequal, and often sexist, global/local world.

Sewing Women: Immigrants and the New York City Garment Industry, by Margaret Chin (Columbia University Press, 2005)

Many Latino and Chinese women who immigrated to New York City over the past two decades found work in the garment industry—well known for hiring immigrants and for its harsh working conditions. Based on extensive interviews with workers and employers, Chin offers a detailed and complex portrait of the working lives of Chinese and Latino garment workers, while exploring how immigration status, family circumstances, ethnic relations, and gender affect the workplace. In turn, she analyses how these factors affect whom employers hire and what wages and benefits are given to the employees. Chin's comparison of the hiring practices of Korean- and Chinese-owned factories illuminates how ethnic ties both improve and hinder opportunities for immigrants.

Sexual Harassment in the Export Processing Zones of the Dominican Republic, by Lourdes Pantaleón (ILRF, 2003)

This study examines the issue of sexual harassment in the EPZs, where nearly 60% of the factories produce garments or textiles. Of the 370 women consulted in the course of this study 40% reported experiencing some form of workplace sexual harassment. Available at <http://www.laborrights.org/projects/women/DR%20report.pdf>.

Trading Away Our Rights—Women Working in Global Supply Chains (Oxfam International, 2004)

Documents the increasingly precarious forms of employment faced by women garment and agricultural workers and the corporate policies and practices that favour their development. Recommendations are made for “making trade work” for women workers. Available at http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/trade/trading_rights.htm.

Violence Against Women in the Workplace in Kenya: Assessment of Workplace Sexual Harassment in the Commercial Agriculture and Textile Manufacturing Sectors in Kenya, by Regina Karega (ILRF, 2002)

This study reveals that women workers in export-processing industries in Kenya, producing goods for the US market, suffer from violent sexual abuse by their employers and supervisors. In total, 400 women participated in the study, which included a combination of interviews, focus group discussions and case studies; over 90 percent of the respondents had experienced, or observed, sexual abuse within their workplace. Available at <http://www.laborrights.org/projects/women/kenyareport.pdf>.

Women and Work in Globalising Asia, edited by Dong-Sook S. Gills and Nicole Piper (Routledge Studies in the Growth Economies of Asia, 2002)

This book sheds light on the real experiences of women in different societies, exploring the impact of globalisation through the changing nature of the labour of women. A comprehensive survey of women and work is provided by using case studies and empirical data collected from throughout Asia and also includes an analysis of Asian immigrants working in the US.

Women and Work: Vol 6: Exploring Race, Ethnicity and Class, edited by Elizabeth Higginbotham and Mary Romero (Sage Publications, 1997)

Explores how race, ethnicity, and social class have shaped the working lives of women and their working conditions, their wages and salaries, their abilities to control their work environments, and how they see themselves and their options in the workplace. A great deal of importance is given to women of colour, non-citizens, and working-class women's groups. The integration of work and family, women's vision of their own work and women's resistance to exploitative work are themes also addressed throughout this book.

Women, Gender and Work: What is Equality and How Do We Get There, edited by Martha Fetherolf Loutfi (International Labor Office, 2000)

A major reference with research and analysis on gender roles and work. Selected recent articles from the multidisciplinary *International Labour Review* about questions such as how we should define equality, what equal opportunity means and what statistics tell us about differences between men and women at work, how the family confronts globalisation and what the role of law is in achieving equality.

Women Workers' Rights—Who Is Responsible: Gender Perspectives in Workers' Rights in Central America with Reference to Labour Rights Instruments, by Julie Porter (One World Action and SOLIDAR, 2003)

Report of seminar organised by One World and SOLIDAR in cooperation with MEC.

Women Workers' Voices: Women Garment Workers Define Their Rights (WWW, 2001)

Women working in factories, small workshops and from home in India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines identify key concerns.

World Trade is a Women's Issue (WWW, undated)

A briefing on trade liberalisation, the implications for women workers and new ways of organising.

Videos and DVDs

Dolls and Dust (Committee for Asian Women, 1998)

A documentary that presents analyses and testimonies of women workers and activists in Sri Lanka, Thailand and South Korea on the impact of industrial restructuring and globalisation on their lives, communities and the environment. Researched, directed and videographed by WAYANG between August 1996 and June 1998 in Sri Lanka, Thailand and South Korea (with additional footage from Japan, Hong Kong and China). 60 minutes

Silk and Iron—The Impact of Political and Economic Crises on Women Workers in Asia (Committee for Asian Women, 2003)

Follow up to *Dolls and Dust*. This documentary focuses on the gender dimension of several key issues faced by women workers in Asia, exploring how Asian women workers organise themselves to transform gender relations and to resist corporate-led globalisation. It aims to provide a platform for women workers in Asia to voice their concerns and facilitate networking between women workers and related groups within and outside Asia. 26 minutes

Twenty Pieces (Fair Wear Australia, 1998)

Documentary by Jocelyn Pederick and Ben Pederick that tells the story of home-based workers in Australia's garment industry. Explains the relationship between immigration and homeworking. 22 minutes

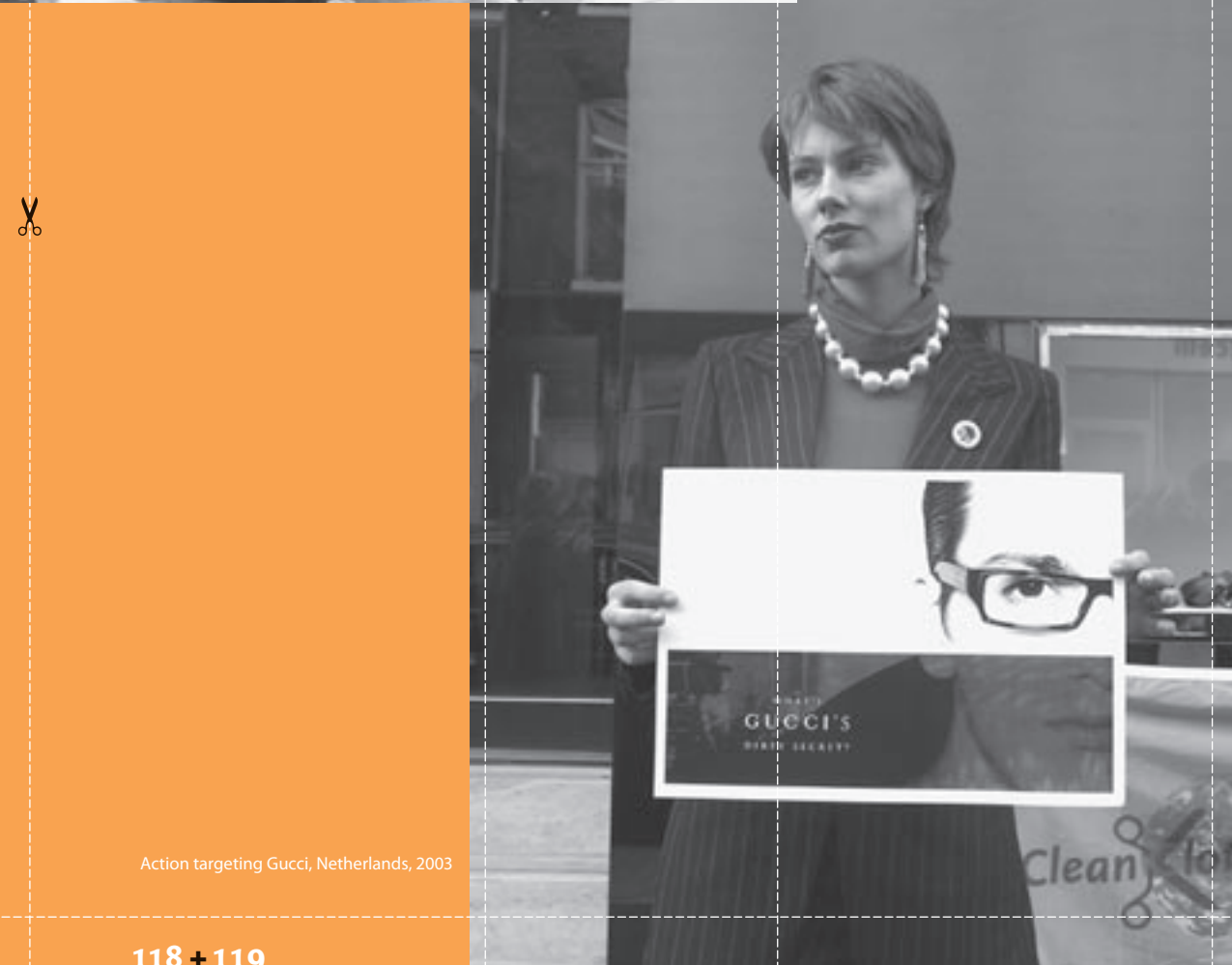
We Shop, Who Pays? (Lotta Film/Fair Trade Center, Sweden 2003)

Documentary by Lotta Ekelund and Kristina Bjurling that focuses on working conditions in the textile, garment and leather industries in Tirupur, South India. It tells of chemicals used that are banned in Europe, of child labourers who do not drink water during the day because there are not enough toilets for their use, of 16 to 19 year olds who sleep on site so they can work two shifts a day, of how water has to be brought into the community each week because the local water supply is unfit for human consumption, and of land contaminated by the dyeing industry, depriving farmers of their livelihoods. It highlights a number of crucial issues, in particular buyers demanding better conditions without offering higher prices and the need for raising workers' as well as consumers' awareness of their rights. 33 minutes

To find links to additional interesting resources please see the websites of the organisations listed on page 119.



Rally in support of Bed & Bath workers demanding back pay and severance, Thailand, 2003



Action targeting Gucci, Netherlands, 2003

Directory of Organisations

Note: This directory of organisations that deal with labour issues and gender is compiled from input provided by the Clean Clothes Campaigns and the international steering committee that guided this publication. It is by no means an exhaustive list. The CCC welcomes suggestions of additional organisations to include in future updates of this list. Please send any comments to info@cleanclothes.org.

Africa

Association Tunisienne Des Femmes Democratres (ATFD)

[Tunisian Association of Democratic Women]
67, Avenue de La Liberté
1002 Tunis
Tunisia
T: + 216 229 53 782 / 71 831 135, or 71 83 1525
E: atfd@planet.tn

Association Marocaine des Droits Humains (AMDH)

[Moroccan Association for Human Rights]
Avenue Allal Benabdellah
Passage Karrakchou,
Immeuble 29, 4 étage
Rabat
Morocco
T: + 212 377 30 961
F: + 212 377 38 851
E: khadija_ryadi@yahoo.fr

Africa

Kenya Women Workers Organisation (KEWWO)

P.O Box 61068-00200
Nairobi
Kenya
T: +254 020 573 072
F: +254 020 573 092
E: kewwo@wananchi.com / info@kewwo.org
www.kewwo.org

Kenya Human Rights Commission

P.O. Box 41079-00100
Nairobi
Kenya
T: +254 20 574 999
F: +254 20 574 997
E: admin@khrc.or.ke

Africa

Civil Society Research and Support Collective (CSRSC)

18 Springdale Rd.
Kloof 3610
Durban
South Africa
T: + 27 31 467 04 08
E: info@csrsc.org.za
www.csrsc.org.za

Streetnet

N228 Diakonia Centre
P.O. Box 61139
20 St. Andrews Street
Bishopsgate
Durban 4001
4008
South Africa
T: + 27 31 307 4038
F: + 27 31 306 7490
E: stnet@iafrica.com
www.streetnet.org.za



Asia

Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC)

Unit 4, 18 Floor, Hollywood Centre
233 Hollywood Road
Sheung Wan
Hong Kong
T: + 852 23 32 1346
F: + 852 23 85 5319
E: admin@amrc.org.hk
www.amrc.org.hk

Chinese Working Women Network (CWWN)

Room 216-219, Lai Lan House
Lai Kok Estate
Cheung Sha Wan, Kowloon
Hong Kong
T: + 852 27 81 24 44
F: + 852 27 81 44 86
E: cwn@cwwn.org /
exco@cwwn.org
www.cwwn.org

Committee for Asian Women (CAW)

386/60, Ratchadaphisek Soi 42,
Ratchadaphisek Road
Ladyao, Chatujak Bangkok
Thailand
T: + 66 2 930 56 34/35
F: + 66 2 930 56 33
E: cawinfo@cawinfo.org
www.cawinfo.org

Dabindu Collective

[Drops of Sweat]
221, Welaboda Road
Katunayake
Sri Lanka
T: + 94 4 83 13 65
F: + 94 2 23 33 36
E: dabindu@stmail.lk

Asia

Friends of Women Foundation

386/61-62, Ratchadapisek 42,
Ratchadapisek Rd.,
Chatuchak, Bangkok 10900
Thailand
T: + 66 2 513 27 08 / 513 27 80 /
513 10 01
F: + 66 2 513 1929
E: fow@mozart.inet.co.th
www.friendsofwomen.net

Hong Kong Women Workers' Association (HKWWA)

1-3 A, G/F, Tsui Ying House
Tsui Ping Estate, Kwun Tong
Hong Kong
T: + 852 27 90 48 48
F: + 852 27 90 49 22
E: workwomen@hkwwa.org.hk
www.hkwwa.org.hk

Karmojibi Nari

[Working Women]
3/6, Segunbagicha
Dhaka 1000
Bangladesh
T: + 88(0) 2 955 87 40 /
957 09 67/ 956 81 11
F: + 88(0) 2 716 06 81
E: knari@agni.com
www.karmojibinari.org

Korean Women Workers' Association United (KWWAU)

418-21, Hapjung-dong, Mapo-gu
Seoul 121-886
South Korea
T: + 82 505 533 38
F: + 82 232 568 39
E: kwwnet@kwwnet.org
www.kwwnet.org

Asia

Rural Education and Action Development (READ)

1926 Sakthi Vinayagar Street
Vilandai, Andimadam 621-801
Perambalur District
Tamil Nadu
India
T: / F: +91 43 31 24 25 83
E: readpen@sancharnet.in or
readselvam@rediffmail.com
www.sahaya.org/read/read.html

Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

Reception Centre
Opp. Victoria Garden, Bhadra
Ahmedabad - 380 001
India
T: + 91 79 550 64 44 / 25 50 64 77 /
25 50 64 41
F: + 91 79 25 50 64 46
E: mail@sewa.org /
sewaorg@sancharnet.in
www.sewa.org

Thai Labour Campaign (TLC)

P.O. Box 219
Ladprao Post Office
Bangkok 10310
Thailand
T: + 66 2 933 05 85
F: + 66 2 933 19 51
E: lek@thailabour.org
www.thailabour.org

TIE-Asia

70, Jalan 7, Taman Maju 2,
43000 Kajang
Malaysia
T / F: + 60 3 87 37 83 80
E: tieasia@tieasia.org
www.tieasia.org

Asia

Union Research Group (URG)

c/o Trade Union Solidarity
Committee AIBEF
6 Neelkanth Apartments
Gokuldas Pasta Road
Dadar (East)
Bombay 400 014
E: rohinihensman@yahoo.co.uk

Womyn's Agenda for Change (WAC)

#1, Sisowath Quay, Sangkat Srah
Chork, Khan Daun Penh
PO Box 883
Phnom Penh
Cambodia
T: + 855 (012) 222 171
F: + 855 (023) 722 435
E: wac@womynsagenda.org
www.womynsagenda.org

Women's Center Sri Lanka

No. 52/61, Peris Watta
Minuwangoda Road
Ekala-Ja-ela
Sri Lanka
T: + 94 11 223 11 52
F: + 94 14 617 71 1
E: ftzunion@diamond.lanka.net

Working Women Organization (WWO)

E-5/ 48-A, Rahmania street
Zaman Colony
Lahore Cantt.
Pakistan
T: +92 42 66 86 382 / 66 86 519
F: +92 42 66 65 301
E: ww@brain.net.pk

Australia

Asian Women at Work

T: + 61 2 97 93 97 08
E: coordinator@awatw.org.au
www.awatw.org.au

Fair Wear Campaign

4th Floor
130 Little Collins Street
Melbourne 3000
Victoria
Australia
T: + 61 3 92 51 52 70
F: + 61 3 96 54 21 36
E: fairwear@fairwear.org.au
www.fairwear.org.au

Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia

NSW Branch
28 Anglo Road Campsie
NSW 2194
T: + 61 2 97 89 52 33
F: + 61 2 97 87 15 61
E: tcfuansw@tcfua.org.au

Women's Electoral Lobby

WEL Australia Office
PO Box 191
Civic Square ACT 2608
T: + 61 2 62 47 6679
E: wel@wel.org.au
www.wel.org.au

Working Women's Centre (NSW)

Level 2, 619 Elizabeth Street
Redfern
NSW 2016
Australia
T: + 61 2 03 19 49 77
F: + 61 2 93 19 36 77
E: info@workingwomenscentre.com.au
www.workingwomenscentre.com.au

Europe

Action Catholique Rurale des Femmes (ACRF)

[Catholic Rural Women in Action]
Rue HM. Jaumain, 15
5330 Assesse
Belgium
T: + 32 83 65 51 92
F: + 32 83 65 62 56
E: contact@acrf.be

Org. AUR

1-3 Cristian Popisteanu Street
Entrance D, 5th floor, Room 585
District 1, Bucharest
Romania
T: + 40 21 312 70 35
F: + 40 21 313 38 83
E: org.aur@xnet.ro
www.muncadecenta.ro

Central America Women's Network (CAWN)

c/o One World Action (OWA)
Bradley Close, White Lion Street
London N1 9PF
United Kingdom
T: + 44 (0) 207 833 41 74
F: + 44 (0) 207 833 41 02
E: info@cawn.org
www.cawn.org

CIDAC

Rua Pinheiro Chagas, 77-2º Esqº
1069-069 Lisboa
Portugal
T: + 351 21 317 28 60
F: + 351 21 317 28 70
E: cidac@cidac.pt
www.cidac.pt



Europe	Europe	Europe	Europe	Europe	Europe
<p>Conseil des Femmes Francophones de Belgique [Francophone Women's Council of Belgium] Rue du Méridien, 10 1210 Bruxelles Belgium T: + 32 2 229 38 21 F: + 32 2 229 38 20 E: cffb@amazone.be www.cffb.be</p> <p>Evangelische Frauenarbeit Deutschland (EFD) [Protestant Women's Association of Germany] Emil-von-Behring-Strasse 3 60439 Frankfurt am Main Germany T: + 49 69 95 80 12/0 F: + 49 69 95 80 12/26 E: info@evangelische-frauenarbeit.de www.evangelische-frauenarbeit.de</p> <p>Felicitas Resavska 25 11000 Belgrade Serbia and Montenegro T / F: +381 11 683 657 E: flcccts@sbb.co.yu</p> <p>Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes (FPS) [Socialist Women for Social Security] Place Saint-Jean, 1-2 1000 Bruxelles Belgium T: + 32 2 515 04 01 F: + 32 2 511 49 96 E: fps@mutsoc.be www.mutsoc.be/fps</p>	<p>NRO-Frauenforum [NGO Women's Forum] Bertha-von-Suttner-Platz 13 53111 Bonn Germany T: + 49 228 963 99 199 F: + 49 228 963 99 199 E: kontakt@nro-frauenforum.de www.nro-frauenforum.de</p> <p>Frauenliga [Women's League] Neustrasse, 59 B 4700 Eupen Belgium T: +32 87 55 54 18 F: +32 87 55 63 42 E: frauenliga@skynet.be</p> <p>Frauensolidarität [Solidarity Among Women] 1090 Wien Berggasse 7/1.Stock Austria T: + 43 1 317 40 20/0 F: + 43 1 317 40 20/355 E: office@frauensolidaritaet.org www.frauensolidaritaet.org</p> <p>Homeworkers Worldwide 30-38 Dock Street Leeds LS10 1JF United Kingdom T: + 44 113 217 4037 E: info@homeworkersww.org.uk www.homeworkersww.org.uk</p> <p>International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) 5 Boulevard du Roi Albert II, Bte 1 1210 Brussels Belgium T: + 32 2 224 02 11 F: + 32 2 201 58 15 E: internetpo@icftu.org www.icftu.org</p>	<p>International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) Rue Joseph Stevens, 8 1000 Brussels Belgium T: + 32 2 512 26 06 / 2 512 28 33 F: + 32 2 511 09 04 E: office@itglwf.org www.itglwf.org</p> <p>International Restructuring Education Network Europe (IRENE) Stationsstraat 39 5038 EC Tilburg T: + 31 13 535 15 23 F: + 31 13 544 25 78 E: AvLuijken@irene-network.nl www.irene-network.nl</p> <p>KARAT Coalition ul. Karmelicka 16 m. 13 00-163 Warsaw Poland T / F: + 48 22 636 83 07 E: sekretariat@karat.org.pl www.karat.org www.womenslabour.org www.kobietypraca.org</p> <p>Katholischer Deutscher Frauenbund [Catholic German Women's Association] Kaesestraße 18 50677 Köln Germany T: + 49 2 21 86 09 20 F: + 49 2 21 86 09 279 E: bundesverband@frauenbund.de www.frauenbund.de</p>	<p>Katholische Frauenbewegung [Catholic Women's Movement] A-1010 Wien Spiegelgasse 3/2 Austria T: + 43 1 51 552 36 97 F: + 43 1 51 552 37 64 E: office@kfb.at www.kfb.at</p> <p>Landesverband der Evangelischen Frauenhilfe [Regional Section of the Protestant Women's Relief Organisation] Geschäftsstelle Feldmühlenweg 19 59494 Soest Postfach 1361 Germany T: + 49 29 21 37 10 F: + 49 29 21 40 26 E: info@frauenhilfe-westfalen.de www.frauenhilfe-westfalen.de</p> <p>Landfrauenverband [Association of Rural Women] Raaffstrasse, 159 4731 Eynatten Belgium T:/F: +32 87 85 19 24 E: annetekava@hotmail.com</p> <p>Le Monde selon les femmes asbl [The World According to Women asbl] 18 rue de la Sablonnière 1000 Bruxelles Belgium T: + 32 2 223 05 12 F: + 32 2 223 15 12 E: lidia@mondefemmes.org www.mondefemmes.org</p>	<p>National Group on Homeworking Office 26 30-38 Dock Street Leeds LS10 1JF United Kingdom T: + 44 113 245 42 73 F: + 44 113 246 56 16 E: admin@homeworking.gn.apc.org www.homeworking.gn.apc.org</p> <p>Network of East-West Women (NEWW) ul. Miszewskiego 17 p. 100 80—239 GDAŃSK Poland T: +48 58 344 97 50 F: +48 58 344 38 53 E: neww@neww.org.pl www.neww.org.pl</p> <p>Permaculture and Peacebuilding Centre—Shtip Str. Hristijan Karpos 43/6 2000 Shtip Macedonia T: + 389 32 388 325 E: ppcst@ppc.org.mk www.ppc.org.mk</p> <p>SÜDWIND Institut für Ökonomie und Ökumene [Sudwind Institute for Economy and Ecumenism] Lindenstrasse 58-60 D 53721 Siegburg Germany T: + 49 22 41 25 95 30 F: + 49 22 41 51 308 E: info@suedwind-institut.de www.suedwind-institut.de</p>	<p>Terre des Femmes [Human Rights for Women] P.O. Box 2565 D-72015 Tübingen Germany T: + 49 70 71 79 73 0 F: + 49 70 71 79 73 22 E: tdf@frauenrechte.de www.frauenrechte.de</p> <p>Union Féminine Civique et Sociale (UFCS) [Civic and Social Women's Union] UFCS National 6 rue Béranger 75003 Paris France T: + 33 1 44 54 50 54 F: + 33 1 44 54 50 66 E: ufcsnational@wanadoo.fr www.ufcs.org</p> <p>Vie Feminine [Women's Life] Rue de la Poste 111 1030 Bruxelles Belgium T: + 32 2 227 13 00 F: + 32 2 223 04 42 E: vie.feminine@skynet.be www.viefeminine.be</p> <p>WAD Neofit Rilski Str. 52 Sofia 1000 Bulgaria T: + 359 2 980 94 47 / + 359 2 980 55 32 F: +359 2 980 59 20 E: wad@infotel.bg www.women-bg.org</p>
122 + 123					

Europe	Latin America and Caribbean	Latin America and Caribbean	Latin America and Caribbean	North America	North America
<p>Women in Development Europe (WIDE) Rue de la Science 10 1000—Brussels Belgium T: + 32 2 545 90 70 F: + 32 2 512 73 42 E: info@wide-network.org www.eurosur.org/wide/home.htm</p> <p>Women Working Worldwide MMU Manton Building Rosamond Street West Manchester M15 6LL United Kingdom T: + 44 161 247 17 60 E: info@women-ww.org www.women-ww.org</p>	<p>Asociación de Mujeres en Solidaridad (AMES) [Association of Women in Solidarity] 20 Avenida 2-44 Zona 6 Colonia los Angeles Ciudad de Guatemala Guatemala T: + 502 22 89 08 20 F: + 502 22 54 54 37 E: ames@terra.com.gt</p> <p>Asociación Servicios de Promoción Laboral (ASEPROLA) [Labour Promotion Services Association] 583-2100 Guadalupe San José Costa Rica T: + 506 285 13 44 F: + 506 285 21 96 E: incidencia@aseprola.org/ comunicacion@aseprola.org www.aseprola.org</p> <p>Centro para la Acción Legal para los Derechos Humanos (CALDH) [Centre for Human Rights Legal Action] 6a Avenida 1-71 zona 1 Ciudad de Guatemala Guatemala T: + 502 22 51 05 555 F: + 502 22 30 34 70 E: caldh@caldh.org www.caldh.org</p>	<p>Centro de Capacitación, Estudios y Asoría para Mujeres Trabajadores (CECAM) [Training, Study and Advice centre for Women Workers] Cumming 663 Santiago Centro Chile T: +56 2 673 52 08 E: cecamchile@vtr.net www.cecamchile.cl</p> <p>Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador (CAT) [Workers' Support Centre] Avenida Reforma 903—3 Colonia Centro, CP 72000 Puebla, Puebla Mexico T / F: + 52 (222) 2 46 05 98 E: catpuebla@yahoo.com.mx</p> <p>Centro de Investigacion para la Accion Femenina (CIPAF) [Research Center for Feminist Action] Calle Hernán Suárez No. 5 Bloque 3 Ensanche El Cacique Santo Domingo Dominican Republic T: + 809 535 26 96 F: + 809 535 25 99 E: cipaf@tricom.net</p> <p>Colectiva de Mujeres Hondurenas (CODEMUH) [Honduran Women's Collective] Apdo. Postal 696 San Pedro de Sula Honduras T: + 504 55 22 838 F: + 504 66 91 180 E: mujeresfem@codemuh.123.hn</p>	<p>Movimiento Mujeres Trabajadoras Desempleadas Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) [Movement of Working and Unemployed Women] Semáforos de la Asamblea Nacional A.P. 3604 Correo Central 1c. Abajo, Managua Nicaragua T: + 505 222 53 93 / 222 26 01 F: + 505 222 26 01 E: mec@ibw.com.ni www.mec.org.ni</p>	<p>Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) International Secretariat 215 Spadina Ave., Suite 150 Toronto, Ontario M5T 2C7 Canada T: +1 416 594 37 73 F: +1 416 594 03 30 E: awid@awid.org www.awid.org</p> <p>International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN) International Secretariat 1225 Otis St., NE Washington, DC 20017 United States T: 202 635 27 57 ext 128 or 135 F: 202 832 94 94 E: secretariat@coc.org www.igtn.org</p> <p>International Labor Rights Fund Rights for Working Women Campaign 733 15th St., NW #920 Washington, DC 20005 United States T: +1 202 347 41 00 F: +1 202 347 48 85 E: laborrights@ilrf.org www.laborrights.org</p> <p>Maquila Solidarity Network 606 Shaw Street Toronto, Ontario M6G 3L6 Canada T: +1 416 532 85 84 F: +1 416 532 76 88 E: info@maquilasolidarity.org www.maquilasolidarity.org</p>	<p>National Pay Equity Coalition National Committee on Pay Equity 1925 K Street, NW Suite 402 Washington, DC 20006-1119 United States E: fairpay@pay-equity.org www.pay-equity.org</p> <p>Sweatshop Watch 1250 So. Los Angeles Street Suite 214 Los Angeles CA 90015 United States T: / F: +1 213 748 59 45 E: sweatinfo@sweatshopwatch.org www.sweatshopwatch.org</p> <p>WIEGO Carr Center for Human Rights Kennedy School of Government Harvard University 79 John F. Kennedy Street Cambridge, MA 02138 United States T: +1 617 495 76 39 F: +1 617 496 28 28 E: wiego@ksg.harvard.edu www.wiego.org</p>
124 + 125					



Women workers, China

About the Contributors

Nina Ascoly is a coordinator at the Clean Clothes Campaign International Secretariat and a freelance writer/researcher. Originally from the United States, Nina has been working with the CCC in the Netherlands since 1998. Prior to that in New York she was involved in various activist initiatives, including the alternative press collective Brooklyn Metro Times (BMT) and the Women's Health Action Mobilization (WHAM!), a direct action group committed to demanding, securing, and defending absolute reproductive freedom and quality health care for women.

Marta Cano migrated to England from Colombia when she was 17. She arrived with only a work permit, looking for opportunities she did not have in Colombia. The single mother of two daughters, she combined work and studying languages and history at university. During her years at university, she was instrumental in setting up the UK section of FIAN International (FoodFirst Information and Action Network), a network that focuses on the rights of people to feed themselves. She has been living in Germany since 1992, from where she works as a freelance interpreter and translator for NGOs involved in social justice, human rights, the environment and development.

Chantal Finney is a founding member of Labour Behind the Label (CCC-UK), for which she was campaign coordinator from 1996 to 2004. She now lives in France, from where she works on a freelance basis. Prior to working in the NGO world, she taught languages, then with her partner set up a global education project in the east of England. Ultimately, her involvement in workers' rights has its roots in the working conditions which her father experienced in his working life.

Angela Hale was director of Women Working Worldwide (WWW), a UK NGO working closely with Southern partners to promote better working and living conditions for women workers. WWW being a member of the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative, Angela was actively involved in further developing and refining code implementation mechanisms. As a founding member of Labour Behind the Label, she had been involved in dialogue with garment companies since the mid-'90s. Angela died shortly before this publication went to press.

Kimi Lee is the executive director of the Garment Worker Center in Los Angeles. Her inspiration to fight for worker justice comes from growing up and watching her mother work in a garment factory. She is also influenced by her family's immigration from Burma, a country suffering under military dictatorship.

Celia Mather, based in the UK, has been a freelance writer/editor on workers' rights in the global economy for nearly three decades. Her interest was sparked as an anthropologist in the newly-industrialising areas of Indonesia. She retains a connection to the labour movement there to this day, and helped with liaison and translation for this publication. Celia's recent activities include editing the Clean Clothes Campaign newsletter, and research/writing/evaluation for a number of the Global Union Federations. At home, she is active in promoting education on global issues for British people.

Jasna Petrovic is regional coordinator of the ICFTU-WCL CEE & NIS Women's Network which gathers 43 women's groups from 24 countries representing more than 25 million trade union organised women workers. She coordinates regional gender and human and trade union rights projects and is the author of different research reports, books and manuals translated into the languages of the region. She was involved for five years in the global trade union working team operating within the UN's Committee on Sustainable Development. She is based in Croatia.

Diane Reyes is a writer, activist, researcher and mother married to a fellow labour activist. She works part-time at the People's Forum on Peace for Life, a Manila-based international, inter-faith and multi-religious movement committed to working for peace and justice.

Maggie Robbins is project coordinator for a forthcoming book on health and organising for workers in export factories, to be published by the Hesperian Foundation, a US-based non-profit publisher of books and newsletters for community-based health care.

Jane Turner is currently international programs officer for War on Want, and prior to this was for seven years coordinator of the Central America Women's Network, a UK-based NGO. She has also worked for the Gender Unit at Action Aid and for the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. She co-authored a chapter for Corporate Social Responsibility and Labour Rights (ed. Jenkins, Pearson & Seyfang, Earthscan, 2002), principally based on interviews with representatives of Central American women's organisations. It examines the innovative engagement by women's organisations in labour rights, their use of company codes of conduct as a tool, and argues against top-down processes and for gender-sensitive practices.

Kathleen Vickery is senior editor of the forthcoming book on health and organizing for workers in export factories to be published by the Hesperian Foundation.

Annelies Vlasblom is a freelance graphic designer who has been working for the Clean Clothes Campaign International Secretariat since 1996. Over the years she has designed many of their campaigning materials such as leaflets, posters, newsletters and brochures. Based in the Netherlands, Annelies also works for other non-profit organisations that focus on the environment, fair trade and refugee rights.

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MADE IN
SYRIA

MADE IN
THAILAND

MADE IN
POLAND

MADE IN
SWAZILAND

HECHO EN
CHINA

MADE IN
HONG KONG



MADE IN
BULGARIA

MADE IN
THE
PHILIPPINES

MADE IN
INDONESIA